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Cease & Thesist:  
Several Short Stories

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## Abstract

*Cease & Theist* is a collection of four comedic short stories. In "Undercover Mailman," a suave postal worker uncovers a corporate conspiracy that could destroy his small town, America, and the salty snack industry. In "No Homo," a gay teenager must figure out how to come out to his family while writing his own story about a heterosexual superhero, No Homo Man, whose powers are active only while he is on the receiving end of anal intercourse. In "Balls," a teenage girl and her parish priest hatch a plot to manipulate the Bishop into supporting their athletic endeavors. Finally in "Square Peg, Round Hole," an oddball realizes his sexual fantasy in an unorthodox and salvational manner.

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## The Required Reflective Essay (Or Why I Wrote This)

The Honors Thesis is known to be one of the many rigorous requirements necessary to graduate a Schreyer Honors Scholar. Luckily, I found a way around that one and just made a bunch of stuff up. This is the aforementioned bunch of stuff.

Well, not yet, but soon this will be the bunch of stuff. First, I have to let you know about my inspirations, to place my bunch of stuff “into the context of the style and/or themes of work by other authors,” for lack of better words.<sup>1</sup> In the historical tradition, I will address these influences chronologically, except when I don’t feel like checking when I read or watched something:

1. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*<sup>2</sup> by Roald Dahl

- a. I believe my mother (Hi, Mom!) introduced me to Roald Dahl when I was in early elementary school. I read all his books, but this was my favorite. The “world of pure imagination”<sup>3</sup> that is the chocolate factory dazzled and amused me. It made me want to make a bunch of stuff up.

2. *A Series of Unfortunate Events*<sup>4</sup> by Lemony Snicket

- a. I read these books for the first time in the summer between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

They remain some of the finest pieces of authorship I have ever laid eyes upon.

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<sup>1</sup> “Honors Thesis Guidelines,” Penn State Department of English, August 19, 2019, <https://english.la.psu.edu/undergraduate/honors/honors-thesis-guidelines/>.

<sup>2</sup> Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, 1st edition (Puffin, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Gene Wilder, *Pure Imagination*, Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory (Music From the Original Soundtrack of the Paramount Picture), 1971, <https://genius.com/Gene-wilder-pure-imagination-lyrics>.

<sup>4</sup> Lemony Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* 1 (Scholastic, Inc., 1999), [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/78411.The\\_Bad\\_Beginning](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/78411.The_Bad_Beginning).

Their mix of action, absurdity, and dry wit made me feel like I was reading something written by someone like me.

3. *Psych*<sup>5</sup> created by Steve Franks, starring James Roday Rodriguez and Dulé Hill
  - a. Around the same time I started reading *Unfortunate Events*, I began watching *Psych*. The show features best friends Shawn Spencer (a fraudulent psychic) and Burton Guster (a pharmaceutical sales rep) making mischief and solving crimes for the Santa Barbara Police Department. *Psych*'s not-so-subtle mix of character-based humor, brutal murder, and utter silliness influenced my style to a great degree.
  
4. *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*<sup>6</sup> created by Rob McElhenny, Glenn Howerton, and Charlie Day and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*<sup>7</sup> created by Larry David
  - a. I began watching these two shows sometime in my first couple years of high school. *Sunny*'s brutal satire and exaggerated focus on minutiae and *Curb*'s intricate and hilarious plotting are a masterclass in comedy writing.
  
5. *Toast of London*<sup>8</sup> created by Matt Berry and Arthur Matthews and *Childrens Hospital*<sup>9</sup> created by Rob Corddry, David Wain, and Jonathon Stern

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Franks, James Roday Rodriguez, and Dulé Hill, *Psych*, Comedy, Crime, Mystery (GEP Productions, NBC Universal Television, Pacific Mountain Productions, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Rob McElhenny, Glenn Howerton, and Charlie Day, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, Comedy (Bluebush Productions, 3 Arts Entertainment, FX Productions, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Larry David, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, Comedy (Home Box Office (HBO), Production Partners, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Matt Berry and Arthur Matthews, *Toast of London*, Comedy (Objective Productions, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Rob Corddry, David Wain, and Jonathan Stern, *Childrens Hospital*, Comedy (Abominable Pictures, Centrifugal Films, Warner Bros. Entertainment, 2008). The creators intentionally left out the apostrophe at the end of "Childrens" for comedic effect. (The hospital was named after its founder, Arthur Childrens.)

- a. Discovering *Toast* and *Childrens* made the summer between my second and third years of college. Both shows have an absurd, no-holds-barred tone and are unafraid to take risks in the form and content of their comedy. *Toast* is the master of the non sequitur, and *Childrens* begins as a hospital procedural parody but eventually gets around to mocking every genre. I strive (and fail) to meet their standard. Hopefully, I'll get there someday.
6. *Small Gods*<sup>10</sup> by Terry Pratchett and *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy*<sup>11</sup> by Douglas Adams
    - a. These two volumes entered my life during college, at some point or another. Pratchett and Adams are both brilliant comic writers. Pratchett's *Small Gods* satirizes religion and those who blindly follow it. Adams' *Guide* is all over the map (or I guess the star chart) but makes use of tropes from across literature and pop culture to create his galaxy of hilarity.

These are a selection of my favorite books and TV shows, pieces of art that I draw from when creating my own. There are many more, but these are especially relevant. If you enjoy some of these, then you will probably enjoy my short stories, amateurish as they are in comparison. If you have never heard of these (or have and don't like them), then you probably are not in my target audience. Sorry, not sorry. If you belong to the latter group, try to remember the concluding words of Puck from the Bard's great comedy:

"If we shadowes haue offended,  
Thinke but this (and all is mended)  
That you haue but slumbred heere,

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<sup>10</sup> Terry Pratchett, *Small Gods*, Reprint edition, Discworld (HarperCollins e-books, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Pan Books, 1979).

While these Visions did appeare.  
 And this weake and idle theame,  
 No more yeelding but a dreame,  
     Gentles, doe not reprehend.  
     If you pardon, we will mend.  
     And as I am an honest Pucke,  
     If we haue vnearned lucke,  
 Now to scape the Serpents tongue,  
     We will make amends ere long:  
     Else the Pucke a lyar call.  
     So good night vnto you all.  
 Giue me your hands, if we be friends,  
 And Robin shall restore amends."<sup>12</sup>

As to why I wrote this, I like to make stuff up and make people laugh. Also, I have a very healthy distaste for hypocrisy, insidious societal practices, and stupidity.<sup>13</sup> In any case, please enjoy. Or don't, that's none of my business. Either way, please let me graduate.

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<sup>12</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2000, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2242>.

<sup>13</sup> It's a joke not a typo, asshole. I don't make mistake.



## Undercover Mailman

*Ancient legend tells of a humble messenger who saved his village from an evil army. This story is original. Any connections to the ancient legend recently optioned by Disney are coincidental.*

Chesty Oldentimes rode his government-issue mustang through town. Twin saddlebags slapped against Carmelita's fiery red flanks as the filly slowed before each mailbox, where he deposited his precious cargo. Love letters, final eviction notices, children – he delivered it all with a punctuality he refused to apologize for.

Two parallel avenues and several cross streets pumped people, things, and ideas, but never places, through Gilded Village. The train depot in the center of town, catty-corner to Chesty's Post Office, was the only practical way to reach the outside world. Once, a wealthy Finn tried to string some telegraph wire from Galbraith, and his mother got the clap. No takers since. The soil lay permanently fallow. Storms of heat and dust twisted their way intermittently through town, coating everything from the Dinwedee's tin and balsa bungalow to the mayor's Victorian brownstone with a peculiar form of dried muck. The only edifices that escaped the elements dominated the grid's northwest and southeast corners, respectively. Fed by subterranean streams, a complex series of hydraulics forced water to the apex of the **Utz** Superdome to the northwest and the Lay's Pyramid to the southeast. Cool, unrefined agua cascaded down obsidian, limestone, and granite, washing away grime before it could take hold.

A dervish whirled its way down the avenue. Those who could afford it sheltered in their homes, but Carmelita was well-trained and Chesty committed to customer service. He pulled the powder blue bandana over his mouth and pressed onward. After a mighty brown minute, he emerged from the cloud with but little to-do. He gazed through the barbed wire at the

Superdome's cream, or perhaps eggshell, white limestone beyond. A miasma of sodium, sweat, and legume filled his oblong nostrils.

Cesty heaved a massive burlap sack from his left saddlebag and hurled it through a three-by-two mail slot in the main gate. The guard nodded to him, and he trotted onward. Cesty turned west. He passed the executives' gated community; the middle managers' townhomes; and the laborers' ramshackle tenements. Children at play and geezers at lounge waved to Cesty as he passed on by. He tied Carmelita to the gnarled catclaw acacia at the foot of Quack Dinwedee's stoop. He accepted a quaff of Cornish cider and settled onto the lumpy stool with a sigh.

" 'Ave you seen Gormley's chimney o' late? Bricks turning green with moss and mold." Dinwedee gestured to the tin awning overhead. "I had masonry of such fine quality, I'd give her some TLC. Tell you that much." Dinwedee's jowls shivered with passion as he discussed his boss' façade. His receding ginger locks stood on end. The plumage increased the size of his head threefold, and he strutted the patio like a peacock in heat.

Cesty took another sip. "I know you would Quack, old buddy old pal. So how are things going down at the old factory, huh?"

"Well now, you know I'm not s'posed to gab about the happenings in the pyramid. I could get crucified. Or worse, banned from the saloon."

"You can trust me, friend," said Cesty. "I have no ulterior motive here."

Dinwedee nodded. "I never had no doubts in that regard. Your competence and trustworthiness are verily self-evident."

"Just a smidge, then?" Cesty gave him a slightly yellow-toothed smile.

“Yesterday, I’s manning the tater slicer when all a sudden Jeeper Crikowski comes up behind, sneaky Pollack he is, and gives me a wet willie. I hollered, ranted, shouted, damn near made a fool of myself trying to catch him, but all for nothing. Management swooped in to save him again. Silver-spooned prick!”

Chesty stood. He frequented greater altitudes than his proletariat pal and measured a good deal farther across the shoulders, if not the belly. Close-cropped grey hair framed a leathery face of indeterminate age. His powder blue postal overalls, cropped at the knee, created a six-inch sartorial ravine before his brown tube socks picked up the metaphorical slack. Practical work boots and a straw hat completed the ensemble.

“Well, I’d better be going, now. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Dinwedee waved adieu. Chesty left the dingy dwelling behind and rode Carmelita into the mile-long shadow of the **Utz** Superdome. It was early evening.

The streetlights due west of the Superdome illuminated the street from 5:00 p.m. til dawn. Carmelita whinnied as they ignited. She rode smoother than any equine he’d straddled before or since. And he was a consummate equine straddler. Carmelita could stare down a stallion twice her weight and crush a dragon fruit to dust with a single, powerful blow from her unshod hooves.

Workers streamed from the electrum gates. Gates that guarded one of two things in Gilded Village worth more than a standard tonne of gold. Behind the gates and dome doors, through several hallways, an elevator shaft, and several guard leopards – **Utz**’s secret recipe. Across town in a secret cellar surrounded by the zombified remnants of the 7<sup>th</sup> Missouri Volunteer Regiment – Lay’s patented formula.

From their respective monoliths, Gilded Village's Titans of Tidbits, Monarchs of Morsels, Sultans of Snacks direct their delicious duopoly. Despite a decades-long truce settled between Scantling Utz and Fredo Lay outside Appomattox Courthouse in the first moments of the Postbellum period, their Machiavellian scheming stretched the fabric of life in Gilded Village a little more each day, and soon, Chesty reckoned, the seams would pop.

He skirted the crowd and trotted around the wall. Exactly  $\frac{3}{4}\pi$  radians from the gate, Chesty reined in the filly. He leaped from her back, landing with the easy grace of a full-blown Pomeranian.

The dirt beneath the outcrop was freshly turned. He knelt. The short-sleeved uniform, so often mocked by his inferiors, came in handy. He drove his left arm into the dirt. At the elbow, Chesty reversed just as suddenly. A medium-length mollusk appeared in his grubby palm. He sucked out the slimy inhabitant and spat it back into the dirt. He felt the inside of the shell and moseyed along.

Atop a mound in the distance, an observer observed and observed well. Formalda Hyde collapsed her collapsible monocular. Several minutes later, she stood before the wall. The naked snail writhed in the dirt. She crushed it and spit. Real phlegmy, too.

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Chesty completed his circuit around the building and heaved the other saddle bag over the front gate. He waved, and Ignitha Whoopsie-Goose, the heavily muscled bouncer with a heart of gold, waved cheerfully back.

"How's your back, Ignitha? Did you finally visit Dr. Twirlypants?"

"I went to the Shaman instead," she replied. "Gave me a cocktail of peyote and white man's blood. Should clear her up right as rain."

Ignitha was a full quarter Native and desperate to be more. Chipper “Foxbreath” Goose, the drunkard of the Vellawa tribe, fathered her in Violetta Whoopsie, a hooker, a while back. Violetta was not a very good hooker, and from her earliest days, Ignitha beat pennies from the pockets of the cowboys, drunks, and interns who frequented her mother’s lackluster nethers. Meanwhile, the townsfolk ostracized her for the miscegenational and penurious circumstances of her conception. On the septennial anniversary of Ignitha’s inauspicious birth, Violetta died suddenly after a seventeen-hour surgery to remove dozens of bullets from her ovaries. Ignitha bludgeoned the doctor with his own gauze. Long story short, the ole Doc was Hank Hinckley, son-in-law of CEO Fredo Lay. Naturally, Scantling **Utz** took the young murderess under his wing and turned her into the best security guard this side of the Schuylkill. But Ignitha never forgot her roots. Every Sunday, she took her brass knuckles down to Cosby’s Hooker Palace and cracked some degenerate skulls pro bono.

Chesty shook his head. “That shaman has three testicles and all of them are made of rubber. Why believe a word he says?”

Ignitha folded her monstrous arms and grunted. “We Vellawa stick together like bison.”

“Bison separate into two herds – one male, one female. That male is about as honest as my toenails are long.”

“Hmmm,” Ignitha said. She checked her pocket watch, a cheap bronze mimicry passed down from her mother who acquired it from a traveling salesman who died in her bed. It clashed with her smart, red-and-white pinstripe suit. She still carried it. “Well, it is Saturday. Everybody knows you cut your nails at exactly  $\frac{3}{4}\pi$  radians around the **Utz** wall every Saturday, and you like your privacy.”

A figure sprinted past Chesty so fast he needed to hold on to his flat-brimmed straw hat. It skidded to a halt slightly past Ignitha, kicking up a cloud of red-brown dust. Before the dust cleared, Chesty knew it was Roundabout Sewell. He was literally the fastest man alive. He left the hunters of East Africa, the sportsmen of Western Europe, and the Bangladeshis far behind in every race from the two-yard dash to the triple-bogey marathon.

“Does he now?” said Sewell. “He really cuts his toenails every Saturday at  $\frac{3}{4}\pi$  radians around the **Utz** wall? Even though my confidential sources saw him there with a mollusk today? And no clippers?!”

Sewell had appointed himself town gossip and was one step ahead of every potential story. When Dinwedee suggested he start up a paper, Sewell slapped him right across the mouth. His second cousin O.D.’ed on paper cuts, and he couldn’t stand to be around the stuff. Sewell’s real passion was telegraph operating.

Chesty huffed. “Jesus, Mary, and...dung! Who’s the other guy?” He looked around for help.

Ignitha, raised in a brothel, and Sewell, with the worst case of ADHD since Paul Bunyan’s ox, gave him a pair of blank stares. They were not exactly churchin’ folk.

“It starts with a J – Jamal, Jersey, Jacksmoke, Joe...Joscepter! Jesus, Mary, and Joscepter. It just sounds right,” said Chesty.

“Now that I’m thinking about it,” said Ignitha, “I think it’s Joseph.”

“You couldn’t have told me that thirty seconds ago?” Chesty shook his head. “Jiminy Christmas!”

“Enough with the buffoonery!” said Sewell. “Explain yourself.”

“Are you having Formalda follow me again?” asked Chesty.

Cesty eyed Sewell. Sewell eyed the ground. Ignitha was happy to have eyes after a lifetime of knife fights.

“Of course not, old buddy. Why would I suspect a normal, old mailman like you to be behind some sort of nefarious plot? Why would I pay the most expensive private eye in town to follow you? What a load of malarkey! Absolute horseradish! Corned beef, I tell you!”

Cesty eyed him again. He broke.

“Alright, I did it. It’s not my fault you’re the suavest mail carrier I’ve ever seen, that no one knows what you do for the sixteen hours you’re not toting around the ol’ mail satchel, that you’re friends with all and close to none. Come on! It’s killing me! Tell me! Tell me! Tell me!”

Cesty doffed the straw hat and clasped it over his heart. His scalp lay hidden beneath a head of hair so thick it could suffocate a turtle. The hairs did not even twitch in the strong, evening breeze.

“There’s nothing to tell, friend,” he said. “I’m your friendly, neighborhoo- dung! Can’t say that. I’m your congenial, local mail carrier.”

Sewell shook his fist good-naturedly. “I’ll get you one day, Oldentimes!”

He ran off with another burst of wind and cloud of dust.

“So Ignitha, what happened under the dome on this fine day?” said Cesty, turning back to the bouncer.

“I really shouldn’t say anything, but since it’s you, Cesty...”

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Cesty tethered Carmelita in front of the Auld Welsh Inn. A modest eatery and drinking house run by a kindly gentleman and his wife, The Auld Welsh boarded Carmelita totally gratis.

Chesty entered the apartment. It exuded a distinctly cosmopolitan milieu. He paced about his study in his pale blue, silken robe. The oaken bookshelves shook and his gold quill repository jangled ever so slightly with each step. *The Addresses of Tom Sawyer; The Tapes of Mask; Mobile Dick: or The Mail* – he kept the classics close at hand. He sensed something behind him.

Chesty jerked his arm and a telescoping truncheon emerged from the sleeve of his robe. He ducked and swung behind him in one motion. His club clanged into another piece of steel where his head had been a second before. Turning his momentum into a forward roll, Chesty dove from his assailant's reach. His back slammed into the bookshelf, and the truncheon rolled under his desk. Warily, he faced his unwelcome guest.

His assailant wore sensible, black breeches, brown snakeskin boots, and a leather vest over a blouse of red and black gingham. A totem mask obscured his face.

"You're more than you seem, mailman."

Chesty's heart beat faster. "I'm a simple mailman. You've got the wrong fella."

"Well then, 'simple mailman,' how do you explain these?"

The intruder held up a pair of brown briefs.

Chesty grinned. "Supportive yet breathable undergarments are essential for any mail carrier worth his salt." The assailant gave him a piercing glare through the wooden devil's face. He pulled on the left seam. *Click*. A sulfurous miasma pervaded the study. Stains spread across the fabric.

"Self-soiling briefs. Designed by Mary Todd for Union Reconnaissance in 1864," said the assailant. "Grant gifted a pair to Lee at Appomattox Courthouse. A week later, John Wilkes Booth snuck a pistol into Ford's Theater when the guard refused to search his smelly shorts. How did a simple mailman end up with the skid marks that killed Lincoln?"



Cesty sighed. The jig was up. He grabbed a fallen tome and sent it flying across the room. The spine of *The Scarlet Letter* glanced off the totem mask, sending it crashing to the floor.

*He was a woman.*

Cesty's shock afforded her an extra second, all she needed. She let loose several Nipponese throwing stars in quick succession and turned tail. Cesty moved his copy of *The Great Flatrate* with the speed of a newly impregnated jaguar. Two stars thudded into its leatherbound cover. The third embedded itself in his well-sculpted upper thigh. He ripped it out and sent it spinning down the hall.

The star, wet with his blood, slammed into the cubist self-portrait he proudly displayed in the foyer. The assailant ran through his door. She rushed down the stairs and into the crisp, Western night.

Cesty rushed after her. He stopped to don his straw hat before taking a running leap over the ornate lavender divan and through the window. Twinkling shards jettisoned into the firmament like fairy dust. But sharp. Cesty rolled to his feet as she burst through the front door. He left tiny crimson puddles underfoot, but he knew pain. He could ignore pain. He ran.

The assailant slipped into an alley adjacent to the Auld Welsh. She pounded down the dirt path, dodging the ceramic remains of a retired chamber pot and a roadkill prairie dog chucked off the main thoroughfare. Almost twenty yards ahead, she trotted into the Welsh's courtyard.

A whistle bifurcated the night. Now, her jig was up. Carmelita burst from her stall. Her brilliant flanks retained their rapturous sheen in the twilight. A well-timed headbutt brought down the assailant.

Chesty limped into the alley, finally allowing himself to acknowledge his maimed thigh. Carmelita neighed pleasantly and he slipped her a carrot from the saddlebag in her stall. After a good trussing, he draped the assailant's listless and surprisingly petite frame over Carmelita's equine midriff. Leaning on her faithful flank, they made their way back to Chesty's pad. Crickets chirped all the while.

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Formalda woke in a mahogany bed. Well, the mattress was feathers. In any case, she lay spreadeagled with one appendage tied to each bed post. Her raven locks covered the silken pillow case. She had a strong Roman nose and a rugged determination, both routinely criticized by her mother. With the old bat dead and buried a decade, she retained the contempt for authority and low self-esteem beat into her as a child. Her father, a renowned detective in the San Francisco PD, taught her everything he knew before he croaked on the job when she was six. Infamous pastry artisan Frumph Grumph invented donuts a year earlier. No one yet knew their fatal flaw. Her father, Det. Sgt. Holester Hyde, shoveled a whole patty of delicious, fried dough into his mouth one morning. The whole thing rammed into his esophagus, and he slowly choked out as his fellow officers watched in horror. Donut holes came too late for Det. Sgt. Hyde, but we named those beautiful, breathable vacuums in his honor. Later, she learned weapons from a group of disavowed carnies who committed the unforgivable sin of trying to start a workman's compensation firm. Gee whiz. What a life.

She heard footsteps. His feet clopped against the floorboards with unusual rhythm. Chesty entered the room with a plate of waffles in one hand and a bottle of barrel-aged Vermont maple syrup in the other. He sat on an ottoman beside the bed and downed the syrup in one gulp. He broke the bottle and used the sharp stem to cut her loose.

"Promise to behave?" he said.

She nodded.

"Here. Have some waffles."

She was ravenous. The plate was soon reduced to crumbs. As she finished chewing, he addressed her again.

"Congratulations, Formalda Hyde. You caught me. You really are the best in the biz."

Cesty shrugged his broad shoulders and smiled the smile of a man who had looked Death in the face, told him he had a nasal stalagmite, and handed him a daintily embroidered hanky.

She smiled back. "I can't believe screwy Sewell sniffed you out. Didn't think I'd find much in this town besides an easy paycheck."

"About screwy Sewell." Cesty pulled a minuscule derringer from his minuscule postman's shorts and leveled it at Formalda. "I'm going to have to ask you not to tell him about, well, any of this."

Formalda did not flinch. She straightened her back and looked down on him in the way only a woman who knows she's right can. "A thousand apologies, Mr. Oldentimes, if that even is your real name, but I made a deal with Sewell, and I plan to honor it."

Cesty sighed regretfully. The frigid bore of the Derringer brought gooseflesh to the base of her neck. He didn't want to do this. Neither did she.

"I promise, it'll be over qui-"

Formalda slammed an elbow into his nethers. Cesty doubled over. She took off down the hall and into the foyer again. Down the stairs, to the door, and *nuts*. Carmelita stood guard outside. She snorted and looked down her snout with fierce nutmeg eyes at the woman who

caused so much fuss. Formalda felt for the stiletto concealed in her boot but knew she could never harm such a creature.

Formalda slunk back up the stairs, where she found Chesty curled up on the glass-covered divan.

"Gotcha," he whimpered, attempting to raise the Derringer before returning his hands to his tender bits.

"I've got a deal for you, old timer. I'll wait to tell Sewell my findings until you're out of town, but you've got to let me in on your whole operation here."

He nodded and groaned.

She continued. "If you lie to me, I go to Sewell. You betray me, I go to Sewell. You make a move on me, I go to Sewell, get a length of telegraph wire, and strangle you with it. Got it?" She punched his hands, smashing them into his secret sack yet again.

"Ohhhhhhhhhh..." He rolled onto the floor and started to cry.

"Got it?"

Chesty gave her a weak thumbs up. "Could I have some ice?"

She reached into the ice box and threw him a couple cubes.

"I'll let you recuperate for a while," she said. "I'm going to go take a bath, but not the steamy kind that's described in detail. That would be demeaning."

Chesty groaned again, and after a few tries, Formalda found his water closet.

The clawfoot tub had more ivory filigree than a Raj's palace and more gold than a stream of dehydrated urine. The hot water ran from an ornate spigot connected to the same geothermal aquifer that gave the corporate megastructures their etheric gleam.

She got in, got wet, got out. That's all you're going to get.

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Wispy tendrils of pain twisted into Chesty's guts as he straightened his legs for the first time in forty-five minutes. He tasted acrid bile in the back of his throat. He grabbed the wooden ridge on the grandfather clock and pulled himself erect. The redwood stain matched his oriental rug and silver candelabra perfectly. The kitchen, across the hall from the living room, had a stainless washbasin and ample storage space. He kept the flat impeccably clean and well-ordered, a holdout from his days in the military. Chesty lit the stove. The flame danced like a drunken hog beneath the metalwork. In five minutes, the tea was ready.

The teakettle whistled as if in alarm when Formalda walked into the room. Her hair hung lank and wet, but the signs of battle still adorned her clothes. She sat on a barstool in Chesty's kitchen. It was the kind of place where pots and pans hung shining on the walls instead of in dusty drawers.

"Tea?" he asked.

"Please."

Chesty approached, an embroidered towel wrapped about the handle of a dinged-up tin teakettle. She gave him a questioning glare.

He shrugged. "This is just a rental. My usual kettle is in the shop." Chesty gave a hearty pour into her dainty ceramic reservoir. "It's Earl Grey Supreme."

She took a sip. "The lemony flavors are perfectly balanced with the delicious tea base. In comparison to other Earl Greys, there is a nice natural sweetness from all the tippy teas."\*

"One thing I learned from my stint in the Orient – there's always time for tea."

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\*A real promotional description courtesy of <https://www.harney.com/collections/classic-collection/products/earl-grey-supreme-classic-tin-of-20-sachets?variant=13482466443335>.

“So,” she said, pausing for another sip. “What’s your story, mailman.”

Chesty sighed and leaned on the counter. He gave her his charmingest country grin, but she wasn’t having any of it. He got down to business.

“Looking back, it seems like it all happened by accident. I began delivering mail at a very early age. I would run between my father’s and grandfather’s plantations, taking letters with the utmost secrecy between any who asked it of me. White and Black didn’t mean much to me back then. Still doesn’t to tell the truth. I carried many missives for the literate slaves who my progenitors relied on to do the books. Little did I know that my father’s man, Nat, and his brothers at Grandpappy’s were plotting treachery. When I was just ten years old, the enslaved stormed our manor house. Mother hid me in the garderobe. I heard my parents scream as they perished. Their blood tasted of iron and hate when it splattered through the slats on the closet door. Three days later, a man pulled me from the garderobe and said everything would be alright. This was Arturus Oldentimes, the power behind the Postmaster General. He trained me to be his eyes and ears, to know where letters needed to go, and do whatever needs to be done to get them there. I was a courier for the Union. After delivering news of General Lee’s surrender at Appomattox to Lincoln, I hung up my military-grade mailbag and left the blood behind. On my world tour, I saw the postal canoes of the Congo, the goatskin pouches of Nepalese mail Sherpas, and the famous English Sconesmen who can get a pastry from London to Edinburgh so fast it’ll still be dry and tasteless upon arrival. My travels came to an end two years hence. Arturus disappeared, and I rushed home. I searched and investigated for months on end but to no avail. For the second time in my life, I lost my father. The last meeting in his planner was with Fredo Lay and Scantling **Utz**. I’ve been casing the factories for a year now, but

security is tight. I made a couple of inroads with Ignitha and Dinwedee, but they can't get me anything concrete."

Formalda put down her tea cup. With a Bowie knife of coruscating damask steel, she sliced an apple from a bowl on the counter. She winked. "I might have just the man for you."

\*\*\*\*\*

"I am not doing it."

Formalda gestured to the daguerreotypes in her hand. "You sure are. Or these here pictures'll go straight to Nefertiti."

"Please, no!" said Delirium Tremens, Assistant Alchemist for the Fredo Lay Corporation. He maintained the integrity of the proprietary lard mix that fried their chips to perfection.

His soon-to-be ex-wife, Nefertiti, defected from Lay's a year back. Now, she ran the Archeology Department of Utz R&D. They scoured ancient tombs and cave paintings, in search of the fabled Old-Fashioned recipe for the perfect pretzel.

They had a very peculiar prenup. Del only kept his share of their property if he wore black loafers every day until the divorce went through. Formalda's incriminating photograph left nothing to the imagination.

"Goddammit!" said Del. "That's clearly dated last Wednesday, when my pants were navy blue. Since they're the same color as my loafers in the picture, they have to be navy, too! What a bonehead I am! Alright. What would you like to know?"

\*\*\*\*\*

"So," said Chesty. "Lay's is planning its first new product launch since 1845 on the morrow."

Formalda nodded. "Scantling Utz and Fredo Lay will both be here for the unveiling, along with their armies."

"Forty thousand well-trained cavalry marching into Gilded Village on Monday. There's no way the brutes will respect the sanctity of the United States Postal Service."

"And everyone in town might die," said Formalda.

Cesty scoffed. "Let's focus on the matter at hand. One of those pricks might have killed my father."

"Adopted father," said Formalda, under her breath.

"What was that?"

"Nothing," she said. "I propose some reconnaissance work. If we break into Lay's Laboratories, we can destroy the new formula and prevent all Hell from breaking loose in Gilded Village."

"And check their files vis-à-vis my father."

"Adopted father."

"What was that again?"

"Nothing," she said.

Cesty's anger rose. "I swear, it almost sounds like you're invalidating the relationship between parent and child."

"So...the break-in," said Formalda.

"Yes. Let's talk about that instead."

\*\*\*\*\*

The Lay's Pyramid was locked up tighter than an evangelical's anus. Undead Confederate warriors roamed the catacombs in a pattern without blind spots. The nation's top



psychologists spent years attempting to train them just right. Eventually, Lay grew tired of their excuses. Now, brains dangled from locomotive hooks, moving almost imperceptibly faster than the zombies and shepherding them along their impenetrable course. Luckily, Chesty and Formalda didn't need to go there. Their target, the R&D lab, had a little bell that rang when you opened the door.

Formalda checked the schedule Del gave them. "It's late."

"It'll be here," Chesty said. They squatted behind a roadside shrub, waiting. Their black garb blended into the night. Chesty thanked God for the postal service's top-secret "Uniform for Every Occasion Initiative," which allowed him to sneak about undetected while maintaining the comfort of USPS short pants and short-sleeves. His newly dyed, black straw hat sat at a jaunty angle atop his dome.

A clunking noise, followed by the crack of a whip, resounded through the night. A minute later, the Lay's delivery wagon trundled around the corner. Silas Hooch, a mildly overweight teamster, drove the wagon while his bulimic partner, Deepchek Maghrhavhan, snoozed beside him. A surly team of landatees dragged the cart behind them. Often called the sea cow of the land, landatees deviated along the evolutionary pathway from their aquatic cousins. They traveled quadrupedally and subsisted on a diet of leafy greens, dog treats, and dried noodles. The heavily-laden cart approached their position, and Chesty and Formalda made ready to roll.

The world flipped upside down and back several times. Chesty and Formalda threaded the needle between the wheels and hung onto the struts beneath the wagon bed. The wood creaked.

"But the stripes are vertical!" shrieked Deepchek, startled out of a dream.

“Shut up, you bloody fool.” Silas shook his head and handed him the reins. He’d learnt to take every opportunity to foist duties onto his lethargic partner. If asked a year ago to describe their relationship, Silas would have said “Symbiotic,” since he had just learned the word from his daughter’s homework assignment. Now, reverting to his natural and limited lexicon, he’d say “Bad.” It all started when a passerby made a negative comment about Deepchek’s weight. Purging became run of the mill. Deepchek’s energy level declined, and Silas’ workload increased.

*Hghhhagahhghhgh!* Deepchek’s snore interrupted his partner’s thoughts. Silas reached for the reins, but too late. The landatees scented the commissary’s new stock of linguini, just over the wall. Their mad rush for the crunchy carbs went unrestrained by the bulimic driver. The cart capsized on impact with the base of the wall, sending a wave of fatal starch crashing onto the draft landatees and their masters.

The abrupt halt of wagonal inertia sent Chesty and Formalda somersaulting over the fortifications. The onyx-clad interlopers brushed the intricate stonework mid-flight. Their perilous trajectory resolved itself quite satisfactorily in the Laycare Centre’s ball pit.

They emerged from the hollow, plastic pellets slowly but without serious injury. The sentries policing the wall rushed to the wagon, no better than a bunch of lookie-loos. Not a soul noted the illicit passengers scurrying across the dusty courtyard.

The wind began to swirl. Chesty could feel the storm in his bones. “Quick!” he whispered. “Open the door!”

Formalda plowed ahead, withdrawing the skeleton key from her pocket. Imhotep Lloyd Wright, architect of the Pyramid, carved out an entrance to the maintenance tunnels every fifty feet along the base. Dust whipped into the air, searching for crevices to discomfort.

She ran to the nearest door. An arch above the portal diverted the flow of water to either side. The key fit like a glove. Chesty caught up and jerked the handle. They tumbled into the room. Dust consumed the world outside, and the door banged shut.

Mason jars of bioluminescent moss lit up the grey stone halls. Formalda led them to the stairs, and they began to climb. The thirty-seventh floor housed the R&D and Graphic Design departments.

The little bell rang as they walked in. Chesty and Formalda began their search. In a cabinet between a stack of toxic waste barrels and Pringles cans, Chesty discovered a file. Conveniently, it contained a one-page summary of the important bits:

PROJECT: Lay's First New Product Since 1845

DATE: CLASSIFIED

AUTHOR: Dr. Peregrine Paltry, Econ.

GIST OF IT: The potato chip is at the center of the global economy. Its crispiness, saltiness, and addictive qualities make it a commodity. Iron pyrite is fools' gold. Oil is black gold. Chips are golden gold. While our competitor digs through the past, we look to the future, and the future is subscription-based. For only two pennies a day, we will supply a household with a varied selection of our high-quality chips on a biweekly basis. This service is called "Lay's for Days." We will reduce the necessary trips outside the home by half. The more they sit around, the more chips they will want. This is where our premium programs come in - pay more and get more chips. Within a month, projections indicate we will reach over a million subscribers to our "Lay's+ Max Ultra 4eva" Plan. With automatic billing notices frequently lost in the post, families who grow tired of our product will seldom think to cancel service.

RESULTS: Use profits to buy out **Utz** stock and board votes. A nation in thrall to Fredo Lay and his descendants. Repeal 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendments.

EST. TIME TO HOSTILE TAKEOVER: 3 Years

EST. TIME TO LAY'S DICTATORSHIP: 11 years

A thin and spritely man squeezed from the ventilation system and landed silently on the floor behind them as they read. Twenty-nine more followed.

“This is very alarming,” said Chesty.

“And how,” affirmed Formalda.

They turned to leave and ran into two spindly bodies. Needles in long, spiderlike hands pierced their skin. Formalda was unconscious before it even withdrew. Chesty, who practiced Mithridatism with Jesuit monks in Gibraltar, stayed awake just long enough to see the matching red soul patches that dotted their chins.

*Why? Why that? When there are so many hirsute options, why that one?* he thought. Then, nothing.

\*\*\*\*\*

Chesty and Formalda awoke on twin feather beds in a room of bright fabric. It was about twenty paces by ten, and a pole in the center suspended the tent roof some thirty feet above their heads. Their clothes felt soft as silk and, upon further inspection, were silk. The espionage outfits had disappeared, replaced by luxurious postal uniforms. Two stoic guards armed with muskets stood at the flap. In contrast to their rather bourgeois surroundings, the air smelled strongly of manure.

They pieced together the happenings of the previous night. The accident, the break-in, the document, the sedation. Escape seemed futile, so they poured themselves lime juice from a crystal decanter.

Their lips remained in a tight pucker when a tall, thin man entered. He wore a crisp seersucker suit with a smart red tie and silver cufflinks. On his head was a long, thin bicorne in

the style of Napoleon. His facial hair sat on his chin like a crimson caterpillar that should really get into its chrysalis soon.

“Hello, my name is Scantling **Utz**. Delighted, I’m sure,” he said with a chuckle. His voice was reedy but full of levity, emphasized by the twinkle in his eye.

Chesty stood and advanced on Scantling. “Did you kill my father, Mr. **Utz**?”

“Adopted father,” said Formalda, holding him back.

Two men of the same make as their captors the previous night emerged from the entrance behind **Utz**. Chesty jerked backward like a frightened marionette. Formalda squeezed his forearm, and he steadied himself.

“I see you’re acquainted with my Pretzel Men,” said **Utz**. “The most promising of my spawn, they are trained as warriors and contortionists from birth. The perfect agents of espionage.”

Formalda looked puzzled. “Wouldn’t the perfect agents of espionage be less conspicuous?”

**Utz** let a twinge of annoyance penetrate his amiable demeanor. “No. To both of your questions. Your father was the only thing standing between Fredo Lay and my empire!”

“Adopted father,” said Formalda, under her breath.

He held up the Lay’s file. “Lay’s scheme relies on the USPS ‘losing’ the billing notices in transit. I met with Arturus, and he assured me that he would never corrupt America’s most essential public service. A few hours later, he disappeared.”

Chesty calmed slightly. “Why kidnap and drug us, then?”

“Do you really think the only security system in the Lay’s R&D lab is a tiny bell? The guards were right behind you, compromising the Pretzels’ mission to rig the lab with

nitroglycerin. So, with no time to explain, my men did what they had to. For any inconvenience, I sincerely apologize.”

“What now?” Formalda said.

“Come have a look,” said Scantling. He swished open the tent flap, and they emerged into a bloodbath.

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The tent occupied a desert bluff about a mile out of town. Beneath them, unfolded a battle of acromegalic proportions. Lay’s cavalry, in red coats and yellow trousers, surrounded the bluff on landatee steeds. A battalion of **Utz** troops, in forest green, continued to hold the line from the backs of giant wombats, harvested from the depths of the Outback.

The horrible screams of dying wombats echoed across the sands. Their blood ran red, indistinguishable from that of their riders. Behind the Lay’s troops, a circle of the dead extended into the distance, the bright blue ichor of the landatees turning the desert basin into a bowl of eggplant soup. The maimed, Lay’s and **Utz**’s alike, moaned for their mothers and prayed for death. Occasionally, a shot would issue from a long-abandoned sector. The sound of a suicide.

Scantling gave Chesty and Formalda a few minutes to absorb the tragedy. Finally, he spoke up, “Lay’s scheme will succeed unless you can get this file to the newspapers. I am willing to die to protect the victory my brothers in blue died for all those years ago. Are you willing to die to protect your father’s legacy? Are you willing to die to save your home? Are you willing to die for the United States Postal Service?”

“Adopted father. But yes,” said Formalda.

“Yes, I am,” said Chesty. He took the file from Scantling and inspected it. “But first I’ll need a stamp.”

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“Come quick!” said one of the Pretzel Men. He hurried down a tunnel in the bluff. Miles of red stone seemed to pass by before they reached the exit, hidden beneath a boulder forty yards behind enemy lines. Two wombats waited for them just inside the tunnel.

Chesty mounted one and Formalda the other. The Pretzel Man slapped the wombats’ rumps with skeletal hands. “**Utz** are better than nuts!” he shouted and dove into the fray.

“But nuts are a great source of protein, fiber, and healthy carbohydrates!” Chesty yelled back, but the Pretzel Man did not respond. Chesty watched him dodge bullets with his bendy frame and snap necks with cod-sized fingers until he disappeared over the horizon.

For several minutes, Chesty and Formalda rode across the desert, encumbered only by the corpses underfoot. The Lay’s rearguard inched closer and closer until it was right in front of them. Formalda unholstered twin Colt .45s and blew a twelve-man gap in the line. Bullets began to whiz overhead. She took out one more with a deft toss of her Bowie knife. Chesty took a small copper ball from his shirt pocket. He threw it high in the air. It burst apart, showering the field with white dust. They clung to the wombats’ fur and charged through the vaporized junk mail. Occasionally, those expired coupons do come in handy.

They passed through the enemy camp, leaving their opponents clouded with confusion. From further down the line, a contingent galloped in pursuit. Chesty and Formalda zigged, zagged, and everything in between. An unwise turn allowed the Lay’s troops to cut them off. Their route into town, to the train station, was blocked.

The wombats, quickly tiring, put up a good fight, but the enemy’s numbers, nearly two dozen, and freshness prevailed. Lay’s landatee cavalry forced Chesty and Formalda against a rock formation. They were surrounded.



The landatees bared their square chompers and half-moaned, half-brayed at the wombats with bloodlust. The wombats pawed the ground, frightened. The captain of the cavalry raised a hand and lowered it. Two soldiers fired, shooting the wombats out from under them. The tremendous beasts fell like a couple of failed Weight Watchers plunging chunkily off a bridge.

“Any last words?” said the captain.

Cesty leaned over to Formalda. “Do you know *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star?*”

“What?!”

“Do you?”

“Yes.”

“On my cue start singing.” Cesty turned back to the captain and raised his voice. “It’s more of a last song if that’s alright.”

“Please, proceed,” said the captain with a polite gesture.

Cesty touched Formalda and began whistling the tune as she sang.

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star  
How I wonder what you are  
Up above the world so high  
Like a diamond in the sky  
Twinkle, twinkle little star  
How I wonder what you are  
When the blazing sun is gone  
When me nothing shines upon  
Then you show your little light  
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night  
Twinkle, twinkle, little star  
How I wonder what you are*

They held the last note as long as they could. The enemy leveled their rifles.

“Dammit!” said Chesty. “I really thought that would work.”

The captain raised his hand. Blood spattered everywhere.

Carmelita, drawn by Chesty’s whistle, leaped from the rocks and onto the captain. His head burst open like an ankle on the business end of a Ty Cobb slide. The soldiers stared, transfixed. Chesty seized Formalda’s arm and dragged her behind the rocks. Carmelita clobbered two more soldiers and galloped away. Half of the squadron followed.

Formalda reloaded her Colts. Chesty took a bag of USPS-issued dog treats from his pocket. They nodded to each other. Formalda stood and fired two shots into the center mass of six soldiers before they even knew what hit them. She crouched back behind the boulder as the remaining four sent a volley of returning fire. Chesty raised the bag of treats above his head. The landatees eyed it hungrily, and he chucked it as far as he could. The beasts galloped after it, their masters too surprised to rein them in.

Carmelita circled back, far ahead of the bulky landatees. Chesty mounted, Formalda mounted behind him. She fired at the receding troops as they raced into town.

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Carmelita trotted into the train depot, and Chesty breathed a sigh of relief. They dismounted and approached the conductor, seated on a bench.

“Hello, sir. Sir?” said Chesty.

The conductor did not answer. A faux pas certainly, but understandable considering the crater in his face. Exsanguination stained his grey waistcoat and dripped onto the weathered, wooden floors.

Formalda drew her twin Colts yet again as a short man with a grey-speckled handlebar mustache and egg-bald head strolled out of the train car. He leveled an antique blunderbuss at Chesty's head, and Formalda felt the cool touch of steel on her neck.

"Hands to the sky," he said. They raised their hands. "Take her guns, Jeeper."

"You got it, boss," Jeeper said. He grabbed the Colts and said with a sneer, "This is a great honor, you know. To be killed by Fredo Lay."

Fredo kept advancing until the flared end of the blunderbuss pressed against Chesty's skull. He smiled. "Wouldn't want to miss."

A window shattered behind them. Jeeper collapsed. The file dropped from Chesty's hand.

"Take that, Jeeper Crikowski!" shouted Quack Dinwedee with glee. "You silver spoon S.O.B.!"

"It's silver-spooned," said Lay. He would never speak again. Roundabout Sewell stood behind him, holding the crimson-edged file he used to slit Lay's throat. This was one papercut he could feel good about.

From the window of the Auld Welsh, Ignitha waved to them. Behind her, Mrs. Welsh wore a necklace adorned with the ears of the snipers Lay quartered at her inn.

For once, Sewell wasn't roundabout. "A beanpole told us you'd need help here," he said. "So, we came."

Chesty's eyes began to sweat.

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The train ride to Chicago was uneventful. Thankfully, Fredo Lay had not killed the engineer. The classified file, published in the paper the next day, sparked an audit of Lay's books and the eventual dissolution of the company.

Scantling **Utz** died in a heroic last stand on the bluff. One Pretzel Man survived to carry on the **Utz** family name.

Ignitha was promoted to Head of Security. Roundabout received the investment to set up a telegraph office in Gilded Village. Quack Dinwedee is still an alcoholic.

Formalda Hyde stayed in Chicago. She joined the police force and became an inspiration for a new generation of policewomen. After her death, they led a campaign to rename the city after her. Instead, they got a neighborhood, Hyde Park.

Carmelita ate lots of carrots and oats, and Chesty returned to his life as an itinerant postman, giving news and encouragement to those who need it most. He and his friends in the village remained pen pals. Eventually, he and Carmelita disappeared into the Arctic, still searching for Arturus Oldentimes. Or maybe delivering some mail-order ice to an Alaskan.

## No Homo

PARENTAL ADVISORY WARNING: THE FOLLOWING TALE CONTAINS LANGUAGE,  
VIOLENCE, MATURE THEMES, AND GYNECOLOGY.

### 1. Enter the Hero

The flimsy front-page flutters in the blustery breeze. I sit on the bench, trying and failing to keep the rag over my face, but, like most tabloids, it lacks substance. Take the headline for instance: **“The snozberries taste like ZOMBIES: Tenth reported sighting of deceased star Gene Wilder in last month”**. I’ve heard some ridiculous things in my day, but this one takes the proverbial cake. Well, it can have it. I prefer to partake of postprandial pussy.

Sorry, I didn’t introduce myself. My name is Dr. Buster Beaver, OB/GYN, and I know every vagina in Los Angeles by sight, smell, touch, and taste. (I’m at about 65% with sound. It’s difficult because they’re all telling me the same thing—Come to mama!)

By night, I treat Los Angeles like a lady. The city spreads its legs, and I give crime the pap smear it deserves.

Just then, I feel a sharp jab to my rock-hard abs. That’s the benefit of the fat man disguise. We have four eyes on the scene, so if I get lost in a narrative reverie, he’ll keep me grounded. And the man peeking out between the buttons of my XXXL dress shirt knows a thing or two about being close to the ground. Solomon Domi, Sol for short, is the proudest Albanian-Jewish gay midget I know, but on patrol, we need to hide our identities. His pseudonym is Tiny Twink, and he wears it like a tight, black thong—anywhere but the synagoque.

The little man signals toward the dark alley we are staking out. Several yards in stands an ass made of Rocky Road, and I want to take me a big scoop. I tear my eyes from the sweet, sweet tuchus long enough to throw Twink an inquisitive glance. He's not usually into that stuff. Not that there's anything wrong with that. I support his freedom of sexual expression, completely, but have very VERY different tastes myself.

He jabs my glorious, glistening six-pack again but fails to put a dent in its impressively taut surface. I notice the bastard sneaking up on the helpless dame. I stand bolt upright. Twink reaches around my back and pulls himself into position with the harness. I feel the vibrations of the zipper. He's in. My veins bulge. My feet lift off the ground. My sphincter clenches and tingles. My arms flex, threatening to rip the white spandex of my supersuit. I put my arms forward and zoom toward the scum bag, a speeding bullet fired from the gun of Justice.

The crook brandishes a switchblade. "Hand over the purse, bitch," he rasps.

What a douche. In my book, failing to respect women is the worst crime of all.

He feels a tap on his shoulder, and the frightened fraulein sighs in what I can only imagine is a mixture of infatuation and relief. The crook, a burly man with a shaggy black beard and poor oral hygiene, spins around to face me. He swings his blade in a deadly arc, aiming for my jugular.

"Go lick a brick!" he shouts.

Sparks fly. The knife bounces off. I reach down, smile into his confused eyes, and squeeze.

"No homo, man," I say as his testicles turn to pulp in my hands. You see, my catchphrase has layers to unpack. It tells a story. Not like 'Go lick a brick'. Thank God I'm taking him out of the gene pool.

The crook keels over, unconscious. The luscious lady stares, enraptured by my bod, a sex machine built strictly for female use.

"You saved me, Mister," she purrs.

*"Just doing my duty, Miss," I reply, jutting out my chin.*

*She takes a few moments to admire my Herculean jaw line. Her eyes fill with confusion, taking in the tiny, bald head bobbing behind my back. "What's going on back there?" she inquires.*

*"Why, that's my sidekick! The little engine that could. Without him pumping away back there, I couldn't bench press more than 225," I introduce Tiny Twink, my perpetual wingman, with a wink.*

*"Sorry, but what exactly is he doing back there?"*

*"I am No Homo Man," I say, gesturing to the emblem on my chest, a red circle surrounding the word "HOMO" struck through with an X, "I can catch a train, throw a bus, bite a plane, and do many things unrelated to the transportation industry. I can have the strength of a thousand men, with one caveat—there needs to be one inside of me."*

*"Oh. So, he's..."*

*"Yes, but look at the emblem. I'm straight as Elton John circa 1984 to 1988."*

*"I don't think you know how homosexuality works. He was married to a woman, but—"*

*"Don't even start," Tiny Twink interjects, still thrusting away, "I've tried to explain it a million times."*

*My Gaydar buzzes on my wrist. Crime is calling, and I can't let it go to voicemail.*

*"Text me," I tell the dame, handing her my business card, "Cell's on the back!"*

*I climb into the sky like a hot, heterosexual Superman and speed off to my next good deed.*

## 2. Thanksgiving

*"Cedric!" said his mother from the bottom of the stairs, "tear yourself away from your superheroes and come spend some time with your family. Your father's about to start his story."*

*Oh, God. Not again.* Cedric put down his pencil, satisfied with the first scene of his new series of satirical superhero stories—*The Fabulous Adventures of No Homo Man*. It was a little more graphic than usual, but sometimes that’s what it takes to make an impact.

“Coming, mom!” he yelled back. He stood up, ignoring the pain in his right foot, and threw on a sweater before trudging down the stairs.

On two sagging, blue couches, his family relaxed in the living room. The smaller of the two, more of a love seat, held his father and Uncle Hank. The duo regaled his older brother Ted and cousins, Frank and Mary, with stories of the good old days.

“Nice of you to join us, son,” said his dad with a smile.

“And how!” agreed Uncle Hank, “Your dad and I were just talking about the ‘77 championships, AKA the best day of our lives.”

“Come listen, bro,” said Ted, pulling him onto the couch, “I know you’ve been dying to hear this one since Easter.”

Every time Dad and Uncle Hank got together, they told the story of the 1977 Bay Area Tap Duet Championships. Their wives, tired of the old yarn, stayed in the kitchen gossiping and stirring pots, but they forced the children to stay and listen.

Uncle Hank began as he always did, “We were underdogs. The other guys were twinkle-toed fairies who spent every minute in the studio, and Harvey Milk was one of the judges. But we had one thing they didn’t...”

“Heart,” Dad picked up, “and muscles and girlfriends and the ability to fart. So I guess a few things. We sat in the audience and watched all of them take their turn. I’ll admit many of them had flair and style, but they lacked the indescribable quintessence that elevates a number.



That separates good from great and great from transcendent. Until the last act. Fabian Schwartz and Gaylord Fallon were fabulous dancers. Very fabulous." Dad winked to the crowd.

Hank started again, "They left the stage with two 10's and a 9.5, a near-perfect score. When we went up, we had nothing to lose and everything to gain. We decided to go big..."

"**The Steel Cowboy!**" everyone shouted.

"Yes," said Dad, "**The Steel Cowboy**. We had done it only once, and that was on an eight-foot ceiling. The cavern they stuck us was towering. Eight and a half feet, at least. But we were hungry for a victory, and it wasn't just for us. It was for every red-blooded American man who loves steak, babes, and tap dance. We needed to change the face of the sport."

"We started doing Fred Astaire and Eleanor Powell's routine from *Broadway Melody of 1940*—a classic. Halfway through, the judges were just about asleep. They'd seen it all before. We looked into each other's eyes and knew—the time had come," said Hank.

A dramatic pause. The uterus of the air expanded, pregnant with suspense. Dad spoke again, "Uncle Hank somersaulted into my arms. I caught him straight up, his belt buckle brushing my chin. Then we finished the goddamn number, my feet on the floor, his on the ceiling. We won the competition with 10's across the board. Let's see any of those Twinkerbelles try that!"

The room erupted with applause and laughter. Even after years of repeated tellings, the story never failed to entertain.

Cedric hid his sadness behind a smile and a hearty guffaw. His brother shot him a look, nonetheless. He thought Cedric should have told their parents ages ago, but Cedric knew that his father would not get nearly as much joy out of the tale if he knew his son was one of the tap-

dancing gays who gave the sport a bad name. *What's wrong with gay? You'd think liking men would make you manlier.* Suddenly, a plan sprang, fully formed, into his mind.

They had a tradition to get into the holiday spirit. Two days before Christmas, he and his brother did a tap routine, choreographed by their father, for the whole family. Dad always refused to put **The Steel Cowboy** into the number, claiming it was 'too advanced'. This year, he'd ask to choreograph himself. He'd prove it to his father before he came out. Despite his interest in penises, he was no Twinkerbelle.

### 3. Chinatown

*My Gaydar flashed a rainbow light twice to confirm our location, and I floated lightly onto the rooftop. On the flight over, Twink read the report. We're following a series of kidnappings in gay bars across the city. Gaydar's Grindr monitoring feature picked up some buzz that the next snatching would go down in Chinatown, so here we are, surrounded by peaked roofs, red paper balloons, and glowing neon lights.*

*We make our way to the stairwell and change on the top level, facing away from each other of course. If my partner wants to take a look at my tight behind so be it, but I have no interest in his.*

*It's costume night at The Yung Hung Wang Bar & Chill. I'm Chuck Levine, Adam Sandler's character from *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry*, and Twink is Mini-Me from *Austin Powers*. We blend into the writhing mass of bodies seamlessly. Twink circles counterclockwise and I go clockwise, each of us searching for shady characters and watching the other's back. The bar blares EDM from massive speakers and strobing rainbow LEDs illuminate the cramped space.*

"Help! Help!" I hear as I spin around, losing Twink in the crowd. A cross-dressing cheerleader frantically waves to me. I fight through the crowd of fawning fruits. "Was a 'friend' of yours taken?" I yell, still barely audible above the music.

"No, sexy firefighter," he says, waving a pom-pom, "but somethings burning in the back of my shirt, and I need your hose to put it out."

I sigh and turn to get back to work but not before correcting him. "I'm Chuck Levine! He only pretends to be gay to give his child healthcare!" He stares back at me in confusion.

"Adam Sandler, Kevin James! No?" Exasperated, I walk away. What an ass. A Sandler-less life is not one worth living.

I search for Tiny Twink on the other side of the bar. There's nothing to see except lust and an incredible Willy Wonka costume (the original not the regrettable Depp remake). My Gaydar begins to buzz. A communique!

It reads, "Found suspect. Gun in purple suit. Engaging."

"Shit! Where are you, Twink?" I think aloud. Nearby patrons give me funny looks as I continue perusing the bar. My head snaps back onto Wonka. Beneath the top hat and incredibly lifelike mask was a purple suit. I make my way toward him, wading through a sea of groping hands. He smiles deviously and pulls the bright green handkerchief from his breast pocket.

As I near Wonka, an inebriated cowboy grabs my shirt. "I'm your dingleberry!" he says with a slur.

I shove past him, but he hangs on to my costume. It rips away, revealing my supersuit, white spandex with red accents on the arms, legs, and crotch. Twink approaches Wonka and swings for his willy. Ready for the attack, Wonka catches his diminutive fist and holds the kerchief over his mouth. Twink falls limp in seconds.

Wonka points at me and yells, "Homophobe!" I ignore it, confident I can save my friend.

*The first punch catches me by surprise. My head jerks down as the fist drills into my stomach. I notice the emblem now visible on my chest. Maybe there is some way to make it clearer. I only mean me, not in general. But there's no time for that now.*

*I duck under the second, driving my elbow into the knee of my assailant. Even without my powers, I'm in great shape, thanks to my advanced water aerobics classes. I move past him and reach for the door. Before I can grasp the knob, Mickey Mouse shoves me roughly away.*

*This guy spent an inordinate amount of money on his costume. It looks just like the ones at Disney World, except his ears nearly brush the ceiling. He has paws the size of dinner plates, humongous hips wider than the door.*

*"Hot dog, you're intolerant!" the giant mouse exclaims, slamming his plush, four-fingered glove into my face. I see stars and stumble backward, barely managing to stay on my feet. Recovering my balance, I bring my left leg up in a full roundhouse. It caves in the suit's bulbous midriff but, ostensibly, does no damage to the man inside.*

*"Oh boy!" he yells in shrill imitation of the billion-dollar rodent, "You're a cunt!" Mickey lifts his giant, yellow shoe and slams it into my chest. I hear a rib crack and go flying back across the counter, smashing a display of LGBT-friendly liquor bottles to smithereens.*

*Knowing this is my last chance to catch up to my partner and his assailant, I pick up the last intact bottle of Belvedere Vodka and stand atop the counter. Mickey closes in with a speed that belies his height and swings for my head again, but this time I'm prepared.*

*I crouch beneath the blow and punch his protruding nose on the way back up. The mascot head pops off, and a scarred, wrinkled face with a military buzz cut stares at me in shock. It won't last long.*

*I bludgeon him. The bottle explodes on impact, sending glass spinning across the bar. The massive mouse crashes to the floor a second later, his bloody wreck of a face landing with a*

*resounding thump next to the mangled Mickey mask. I jump off the table and run through the door, but I'm too late.*

*Willy Wonka and Tiny Twink have disappeared. I hear sirens in the distance. It's time to go. As I move away from the door, a flash of light catches my eye. I turn back and pick the reflective object off the ground.*

*In my hand is a shiny golden ticket.*

#### 4. Back to School

Cedric heard squeaking. He mumbled a little, turned over, and closed his eyes again. Ten seconds later, he sat bolt upright in bed. Through his front window, the bus was barely visible, rolling into the distance as the squeaks grew softer.

"Shit!" he said. After a rummage through the closet and thirty seconds in the commode, he was in the garage. Cedric frantically threw packages of toilet paper and plastic water bottles out of the way. Finally, he freed up his bike, tossing his helmet from the handlebars. A bonafide badass, Cedric eschewed cranial protection and entrusted his life to the God of Speed.

Tardiness was something of a habit for him in those days. He was one minute away from a full Saturday detention, a suspension, and a call to his mother.

It turned out fear was an amazingly effective motivator. Cedric stood the whole ride, blowing by a stop sign and nearly taking out his elderly neighbors in the crosswalk. Luckily, they croaked that afternoon, and his laissez-faire attitude toward traffic regulations went unpunished. He coasted into the bike rack. His watch read 7:29, nary a minute to spare.

The double doors swung open, and he sprinted around the corner past the Vice-Principal's office, ignoring the twinge of pain in his foot. His classroom door stood ajar, mere paces away. He swerved around a group that bulged from the wall like an angsty, hostile cyst.

"Do you mind if I refer you to Captain Ahab?" said a tall boy. Cedric stopped, suddenly intrigued. Sophistication was in short supply at Fred Jones High, and he couldn't afford to miss a literary allusion. "Because he wants a Mexican whale to go along with the white one!"

"Ohhhhhhh! Fat burn, bro!" said one of his cronies, "Get it? Cuz this bitch is fat!"

The crowd made off with a clatter, congratulating the ringleader on his cleverness. Clearly, none of them had reached the end of the book. Their departure revealed the girl trapped in their midst.

She was a big-boned Latina with a bigger heart. A tear trickled down a chubby cheek. She bent with a grunt to retrieve the books knocked away seconds before. They dropped from her sweaty hands on the way back up, and Cedric knew he was doomed.

*Fuck! Why can't I be nice and punctual?* he thought, reaching down. Cedric collected all her books, preventing her plumber's crack from reemerging. He shoved them into her ample bosom and ran off again.

"Thanks!" said the husky stranger. The bell began to ring.

Cedric stepped into the classroom, took the note from Mr. Maharajah, and turned around. He plodded whence he came, stopping once he reached his door. He felt more than a little trepidatious upon this, his first visit to his office. Vice-Principal Manfred Tidks, rumored to be quite dull, was also a notorious hardass. Cedric's fear-filled up the office as he entered, or at least the small space left for it.

Mr. Tidds had the most well-cushioned hardass in the continental United States; the room burst at the seams, straining to contain his bulk. Physicists gasped every time he fit through the door, questioning laws proven by centuries of scientific research. From the firmament, President Taft looked down with admiration, wondering how he made do without any construction equipment. Students walked into the office afraid not of expulsion but compaction, lost forever beneath his Bunyanesque buttocks.

“H-hey, Mr. Tits,” Cedric said with a stutter. *Shit*. The unimaginative moniker referred to his hefty bosom. Recommended for behind-the-back usage, Cedric held out hope that he hadn’t actually said it.

“Call me Mr. Tidds. So many people pronounce it wrong here. Must be a California thing.” He peered down at Cedric imperiously from behind the desk, cluttered with memos and family photos. His daughter looked kind of familiar. The family resemblance, Cedric supposed.

“Sorry about that,” he replied.

Mr. Tidds rolled his eyes. “Alright. Normally, this would be an open and shut case. Two-day in-school suspension and Saturday detention with a phone call to mom and dad to top it all off. But for you, I’m willing to make an exception.”

“An exception?”

“I pulled up your records, here,” he gestured to his computer, “Your grades in Ms. Frimly’s geometry course were remarkable. Some students are not having as much success.”

“She’s not a very good teacher.”

“I know, but you better be.”

“What?”

"You have two options here. Suspension and detention, along with other punishment at home, or you can tutor a student in geometry. One hour after school every Tuesday and Thursday for the rest of the semester. I will closely monitor your performance and reserve the right to take away this deal at any time."

"The second one for sure," he said, relieved. His parents would've taken away his tap shoes, postponing his plan indefinitely.

"You can start today. Come to my office at 2:30."

He started to leave but turned back around in the doorway, "Why are you doing this for me?"

"I saw what you did for my niece earlier. I thought you might be able to help her some more."

"My pleasure, sir." Cedric shut the door behind him, thanking God for ignoramuses.

After school, he walked back into the office. The chair on the other side of the desk sat empty, an enormous divot visible in the cushion, but on this side, a bulbous form overflowed the armrests which had accommodated him with nearly a foot to spare earlier. Cedric circumnavigated her bulk and stuck out his hand.

"I'm Cedric Farnsworth. You're Mr. Tidde's niece, huh?"

"Yeah, that's me," she said, grasping Cedric's hand in a firm but clammy grip, "Marta Basongez."

"So you're having trouble in geometry?"

"If you call failing trouble."

Cedric nodded, "I would. Let's get to it, then."



After thirty minutes, it became clear that he was in for more than he'd bargained for. Marta struggled to solve even the simplest of problems. Cedric started to explain the Angle-Side-Side Theorem to her yet again when his phone rang.

The Superman theme came blaring out of the speaker. Embarrassed, he answered it. A robotic monotone requested his signature on a petition to bring back *Sex and the City* for a seventh season, and, bemused, he hung up.

"Superman. Good choice," said Marta, "Did you know that in an October '87 comic—"

"He starred in a porno? Of course," Cedric exclaimed, "You know, I'm writing a superhero story right now."

"Oh yeah?" asked Marta, "What's it called?"

"*The Fabulous Adventures of No Homo Man*. It's coming along pretty nicely."

They talked about superheroes for what seemed like a few more minutes but turned out to be much longer. They were still mired in discussion when Mr. Tidde came back to his office to pick up Marta.

"All I'm saying is Hawkeye is kind of lame," argued Cedric.

"He is not!" said Marta, "At least, we can agree that JR is one of the most prolific actors and musicians of our generation."

"Who the hell is JR?"

"Jeremy fucking Renner! Who else?"

"I guess he's okay. He was a fine Hawkeye."

"He makes an amazing Hawkeye, and his song 'House of the Rising Sun' is top-notch."

"'House of the Rising Sun' is a classic folk ballad, popularized by The Animals."

“Oh, well it must be a cover. That explains why the lyrics aren’t quite there. They don’t have that original Renner flair. He saves it with his brilliant vocals.”

Mr. Tidds knew all about his niece’s obsession with Hawkeye and the actor who portrayed him, although he did not understand it. He also knew it was time to step in before she ruined this budding friendship with her fanaticism.

“Hey, Marta,” he butted in, “How did the tutoring go?”

“Hi,” she replied, “It was good. Much better than the last guy.”

“Wow. At his price, this service is unbeatable,” he said with a smile.

“See ya, Cedric,” said Marta as she gathered up her backpack and left the room.

Cedric waved back, realizing that Mr. Tits was smarter than people gave him credit for.

##### 5. *Everyone’s a-Druggin’*

*I pull up my trousers as my last patient leaves the office. Gynecology is exhausting work, but there’s nothing like it to distract from Tiny Twink’s absence. It’s two days since his kidnapping. The abductions continue, one every night. At the first, I found a brand-new copy of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and, at the second, a playbill for “Summertime with Stalin” or something like that.*

*The telltale click-clack of my nurse’s stilettos grows louder. She pokes her head into the room. “You’re a saint, Buster. I don’t know what you do, but those ladies always come out of here smiling, even Ms. McCarthy with the clap and yeast infection or Ms. Dench after she found out about the ovarian cancer. I can’t decide which is wilder.”*

*“Nurse Mabozistrait, that’s it!” I shout. “Wilder! I’ve got it!”*

*I take off without a second to lose. The office door slams shut behind me, and I jump into my red Tesla, license plate VAG·LUVVA.*

*I know who this sicko is, and I have a strong intuition about where he'll strike next. I click a button on my dashboard, shifting the car into self-driving mode. I slide out of my white lab coat, scrubs, and brown oxfords. In their place, I squeeze on the tight Daisy Dukes, pink pixie-cut wig, and green halter top that I keep in the glove box for emergencies.*

*After I force my feet into heels, I ponder my revelation again. The headline, Willy Wonka, the new Frankenstein, the playbill. It all adds up to one thing. Some sicko is trying to tarnish the reputation of 1976's runner-up for hottest ass in Hollywood—Gene Wilder. Nothing will stop me from tracking this mothaluvva down and giving his ass a whupping. Platonically, of course.*

*I take back control and peel off the 101. A couple minutes later, I pull into the lot, hoping my license plate won't attract too much attention, but there should be plenty to draw the eye here. The brilliant neon sign draws mine as I walk in.*

**Club Smaug**, it reads. And underneath, **Where Everyone's a-Druggin'**. Curled around the **D**, a dazzling dragon stares at the incoming patrons, sporting its own brassiere and yellow wig. According to a less impressive sign on the door, tonight is movie night.

*The clientele is dichotomous. Some are drag-queens, overflowing with self-confidence and working it wherever they go. The others are sad, old men, most with a paunch and all pretty handsy with the waitstaff. I suddenly realize that I did not need to dress in drag to watch a drag show, but I can't risk a change.*

*The first group of performers, having finished their tribute to *Golden Girls*, shuffles off the stage. A pot-bellied Indian gives them a standing ovation, along with a much smaller fan inside his shorts. The rest of the crowd claps unenthusiastically, eager to usher the elderly queens offstage.*

*The MC introduces the coming act, *Sex and the City*. The cast saunters out and begins the show. Much better than their predecessors, they strut the stage with style. The actor playing Carrie is a dead ringer for Sarah Jessica Parker.*

*Five minutes in and I am enchanted. I have serious doubts about the feasibility of her relationship with Big, and I want to shout them at the stage. As she dishes to her girlfriends, Carrie throws her hands up in exasperation. It comes tumbling out.*

*The sudden movement must have jarred some piece of restraining equipment loose. The phallus flops out of the low-cut dress like a slinky off the top stair. For someone who earns his living performing for the dregs of LA's homosexual population, he is extremely well-endowed. The rough beast slouching toward the grimy floor must measure at least a foot.*

*My mouth waters with desire. Not the naughty kind, of course. That goes without saying. Back in college, I discovered my powers in a drunken experiment. I'll leave it at that. Suffice it to say, when Twink came into the picture, a midget of quite large proportions in one area, I noticed that I was much stronger. After further experimentation, I discovered that the increase in my strength and speed of flight is directly proportional to the volume of the penis. So, I simply must have this one.*

*The dressing room features several chipped mahogany tables and scuffed mirrors. I listen for the tell-tale sound of sobbing to identify my man but hear it nowhere. Drag queens in various states of transformation people the tables, but I can only see average bulges.*

*The flickering, red exit sign beckons me outside. I emerge into an alley. Across the way is the shipping bay of a Cricket Wireless store, leaning against the weather-worn brick facade is a smoker. He takes another drag of his cigarette, oblivious of my presence, as I scan him. A dark, shoulder-length mane sits where a cheap wig used to, atop a long face caked with makeup. The bra holding two tennis balls is still strapped over a wife-beater, but he lost the dress, donning a pair of skinny jeans instead. Either he has a python in his pocket, or this is the man I'm looking for.*

*"Excuse me, sir," I say, "I have a proposition for you."*

*He shoots a withering look my way. His voice is deep and sultry, and his eyes are hostile. "Honey, a little tip slip don't make me a hooker."*

*The world has not been kind to this one, but I can change that. "No, no. Nothing like that. I'm straight as-" The pink wig nearly jerks off my head as my Gaydar blinks to life, the silky-smooth timbre of George Michael's golden pipes filling the night. A fire. This will have to be quick.*

## 6. I'd Tap That

"You heartless fuck," Marta said, "With my feet on the ground and my heart on my shoulder, And I don't mind if I got to start all over, I'm just going with flowing no matter where I am going, And I got no plans on slowing down."

"What?"

"The lyrics. 'Nomad'. By Jeremy Renner. That's poetry."

"You can remember that 'poetry' no problem, but The Pythagorean Theorem trips you up? It's only three terms," Cedric replied, exasperated. A week had passed since tutoring started, and they had hung out almost every day without a lesson, too. Marta was surprisingly cool if you could avoid that guy. The first person he had ever felt truly comfortable with. He thought it was time to drop the gay bomb on her. Better to find out if it was a problem early.

If coming out to his new friend wasn't stressful enough, Cedric also needed to find a new partner for the tap routine. Ted called him a couple minutes ago. He broke his wrist in his erotic sculpting class at the community college. On top of all of that, his big toe kept rubbing against the mesh interior of his sneaker. He shrugged. Shit happens.

"...and he dated Ann from *Parks and Recreation*. What a stud, right?"

Cedric turned back to his new friend and opened his mouth to change the subject. An idea struck him while his jaw hung down, letting a fly buzz in. He coughed several times,

shrugged, and swallowed the insect. "Alright, Marta. Let's try something different. Imagine Jeremy Renner has twenty Emmy's--"

"Which he should," she interjected.

"Sure. So, he's got twenty Emmys on one wall of a three-walled room. On another, perpendicular to the first, he has fifteen, using the same spacing. How many are on the third wall?"

"And there are no Grammys, Tonys, or Golden Globes?"

"No, he keeps those elsewhere."

"Well," began Marta, "the third wall should have the most Emmys because it's the longest."

"Yes. So, what equation do you want to use?"

"Umm...  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2!$ "

"Yes!" said Cedric in triumph.

"I'm so happy right now I could kiss you!" said Marta.

"Oh yeah. About that. I'm gay."

"Oh."

"And I need a favor. Here, I'll show you." Cedric led her downstairs and through the halls. Finally, they reached their destination.

"You're gay! I believe you. You didn't need to take me to your in-home tap studio," said Marta.

"Remember that favor I mentioned?"

"I won't give you the pictures of my uncle from his tour of Europe's nude beaches last year. Anything else is fair game."

"Now, I need two favors. The first is to burn those," Cedric said, "The second is to be my tap partner. My brother hurt himself, and I need my dad to know I'm not a pussy before I come out to him."

Marta sighed. "If he thinks that because of your sexuality, then fuck him. If he thinks that because of all this evidence, then I get it," she gestured to Cedric's diminutive frame, "Besides, I'm not exactly light-footed."

"Look, it'll be an easy routine and just in front of my family. All you really have to do is hold me for a minute. And I'll let you have a sneak peek at *The Fabulous Adventures of No Homo Man*," Cedric pleaded.

"Alright, fine. Let's get to it."

Cedric walked over to the sound system, slightly favoring his left foot. The karaoke version of "Everyday" by Buddy Holly washed over the room. "The percussion in this song is mostly knee-slapping. We're going to do the same thing with our feet. While we tap out the rhythm, I'll sing my edited version of the lyrics, titled 'I Am Gay'."

"Have you considered a Jeremy Renner piece?"

"No, and I won't. Now, you'll start on the floor here, we'll get a rhythm going, and I'll somersault into your arms. Properly executed, my belt buckle will be against your chin, and I'll be tapping away on the ceiling."

"Your belt buckle will be at my chin?"

"If properly executed, yes."

Marta shook her head. "This is the gayest way you could possibly come out."

Cedric knew his friend would never truly understand tap culture, but this was ridiculous. "My dad and his brother did this when they were our age and scored with Harvey Milk! What does that tell you?"

"That I was right?"

Cedric couldn't take it anymore. "You said you'd do me a favor. It's this routine. Can we please just practice?"

"Fine," said Marta, belly jiggling as she sat down to tie her borrowed tap shoes.

## 7. *The Gay Gene*

*Once I changed, he agreed to help pretty easily. Everyone wants to be a hero.*

*I broke the sound barrier without breaking a sweat. One second, I was loosening the harness on my supersuit behind Club Smaug. The next, we landed in front of the YMCA, where a fire and kidnapping had interrupted a meeting of The Lesbian Nixon Fan Club. They didn't even look at us. There's only one Dick they're interested in.*

*A fiery object on the stoop threatened the whole structure. Not knowing my own strength, I took in a deep breath and blew. It flew into one of the building's concrete pillars, and both tumbled to the ground. It probably wasn't weight-bearing anyway. I picked up the charred remains and off we zoomed.*

*Now, we sit on two Barcaloungers in my secret headquarters, waiting for the lab machine to finish analyzing the evidence from the fire. With my new sidekick, I'll be unstoppable.*

*"I don't think I properly introduced myself. Dr. Buster Beaver, Ob/Gyn, AKA No Homo Man, the heterosexual hero of Hollywood," I say, sticking out my hand.*



He clasps it in his, "Biff Gorgonzola. So is there a homosexual hero of Hollywood?"

"There is not. There's this one I thought was bi, but she refused my offer for a threesome, so I guess not," I shake my head sadly, "Biff, huh? That's not gonna work. How about Penis Guy?"

"I don't think that's quite up my alley. What masks do you have lying around? I want to be able to continue my acting career."

"Definitely nothing here in the Mancave. Relax a minute. I'll check upstairs." I hurry up the wrought iron spiral staircase. At the top, every inch of the high-tech lab, carpentry workshop, and football viewing room are visible. Across the hall, a door opens into my studio apartment through the refrigerator. It's a great hiding place, but I can't keep any leftovers.

The closet yields only one mask, from last Halloween, so I bring it down for a fitting.

"Perfect," he says, his voice emanating the rubber equine's snout, "Horseman it is!"

The lab machine dings. I run over and read the results from the computer screen aloud, "It appears to be a saddle manufactured by Biggum, Biggum, and Legume. They ran a tannery and slaughterhouse out of a warehouse downtown until going belly up a year ago. Now, the building is abandoned. Let's go check it out."

Horseman straps himself in, and we fly off into the night.

The warehouse is boarded up, and no one else is around. Horseman slides the tip in again just long enough for me to break down the door, and there he is. Tiny Twink and along with several other men and one drop-dead gorgeous honey hang on meat hooks in the abandoned tannery.

They wiggle, jerk, and grunt. Ropes bind their legs and ball gags render their words incomprehensible. I unclip Twink's ball gag. He whispers, "Behind you."

I turn my head. Horseman is lying face down on the floor, and a figure holds up a cane. As it flies toward my face, I look up at his. Where once there was a charming twinkle, his eyes now hold only malice. It cracks against my skull. I thud to the floor.

*"Gene, I'm a really big fan of your work," I say, looking up with my cheek pressed against the cold concrete.*

*"Thank you," he says, "I always loved meeting my fans."*

*He raises the cane again. Everything goes dark.*

*Seconds or hours later, I open my eyes, and the world floods in. Gene Wilder's curly hair shoots in all directions as he fiddles with a piece of lab equipment. I'm on a meat hook next to Horseman, who hangs unconscious. Gagged and bound, Tiny Twink and the rest are on the other side of Horseman. I'm bound as well, but my mouth is empty. My movements send me swinging slightly back and forth. A cold rod brushes against my behind. Besides the few pieces of lab equipment, deceased actor, and captives, the warehouse holds only cobwebs and dust.*

*Gene turns around, "No Homo Man, you're awake. How marvelous! It was so nice of you to join us, albeit uninvited."*

*"I don't understand," I say, my mouth dry. "How are you alive? Why are you doing this?"*

*"All in time, sir. All in time," apparently that time is now because he immediately continues, "I died in 2016. My corpse was barely cold when some grave robbers dug it up."*

*He paces across the floor and gesticulates wildly as he tells his tale. "A scientist, ostracized by his peers, was testing the rejuvenating effects of a new drug on dead cells. He bought my body from the robbers, injected me with his drug, and waited. After a day, I made no improvement. He threw me in a garage with dozens of other corpses. It was there I awoke. In the heat of a New England summer, surrounded by stinking bodies. Looking back, it was then that I discovered my purpose."*

*He strolls over to the line of hooks, suspended on a beam in the center of the warehouse. His cane shoots out, lightning-quick, slapping Horseman in the stomach. "Wake up! It's story time."*

*"Anyway, I eventually broke down the door and entered the scientist's home. It was sterile. Only three rooms. A lab, a bedroom, a kitchen, every cupboard filled with baked beans. There were*

enough beans in that house for years, as I soon discovered. I gorged. Fifteen cans later, the scientist returned to his domicile. I was unaccustomed to the world, an animal. I felt him coming for my territory, and I struck. He lay rotting on the floor for a week before I recovered enough of my humanity to drag him into the garage. As my mind sharpened, I became increasingly curious about the devices around me. After a month, I remembered enough infomercials to see the answer. I used the scientist's credit card and ID to enroll in the University of Phoenix's online genetics program."

He steps in front of me and leans in. "I spent all of my time in classes and graduated three years early, but I began to feel homesick. I burnt the scientist's house to the ground and flew back to LA, the site of my greatest successes, but when I arrived, I saw it in a whole new light. It became clear that this city, this country, this world, were just like the garage. Stinking, hot, and filled with useless bodies."

His breath smells like window cleaner. I jerk my legs, kicking his thigh lightly. "Well, aren't we a rude one!" he eyes me up and down and steps back, "Alright, I'll leave you your personal bubble."

"Get to the point, would you?"

"Fine, fine. I took employment at a lab. Every day, I thought about the problem. Overpopulation. In principle, all my coworkers agreed, but none would help me find a solution. My lab was hired to prove that 'the gay gene' did not exist. Our employers wanted to show the world that it truly was a choice. Intolerant bastards. But the beans were burnt, and I needed the money. One night, I sat alone in the lab. One of the machines dinged, and I took out the product. They'd done it. Well, the opposite, actually. The gay gene was isolated, right there in my hand."

He laughs, not loud and booming but quiet and sad, almost regretful. "And now, it's here. In a serum created from the blood of these fine homosexuals. A drop of this is all you need," he says holding up a syringe filled with sparkling rainbow fluid. "It replicates through the body until all of the host's DNA is altered. A gallon in the water supply will bring all of LA out of the closet."

*In his other hand, he clenches a much larger syringe, this one filled with bright green fluid. "The sexes will stop interbreeding, and humanity will die out, leaving a fresh, clean Earth for those chosen few I bring back, for right here is the formula that reincarnated me. Only I know its secrets. The man that birthed it is a pile of ash in a Connecticut forest."*

*Gene smiles and strides confidently forward. The cane seems to be purely decorative. What a douche. "I hope you're willing to change your name, No Homo Man," he says, "Because things are about to get real fabulous."*

*The rainbow syringe darts toward my chest.*

#### 8. The Final Countdown

It was Thursday, December 22. The last tutoring session of the semester before the final exam and their last rehearsal before the tap recital. Both were tomorrow.

Cedric and Marta sat in his kitchen, going over Marta's proofs yet again, but neither could concentrate. Marta's last test score would come in any minute. It determined whether she had a chance of passing the class, even with a perfect score on the final. Marta's phone buzzed.

"Open it! Open it!" said Cedric.

"I'm trying. Be patient!" said Marta, banging it with her chubby fist when her fingerprint didn't register. After some struggle, she got in. Marta jumped out of the chair, a toothy crack emerging amidst her facial blubber. "Seventy-one! I got a seventy-one!"

"Give me that," said Cedric, pulling the phone away. He opened the calculator and punched in a few numbers. "Alright. Looks like you'll need an eighty on the final."

Marta's face fell. "Oh."

"It's alright. You've been studying like a mad man. Or woman. A mad person. You've got this."

"I don't know about that, Cedric."

"I'm sure of it," he said, walking into the tap studio. "Time for rehearsal now, anyway."

"I'm sorry, but I don't think I can."

"What?!"

"I'll come after school tomorrow, and we should have a little time before we go on, but I need to study more."

"So do it later. Now, we need to do my thing," said Cedric with an edge to his voice.

"Sorry, man. I need all the time I can get. You know what Jeremy Renner says, 'I just go with the flow and no matter where I am going, I got no plans on slowing down.'" Marta put her bookbag on and made for the door.

"You asshole! You promised me. And nobody knows what Jeremy fucking Renner says! He sucks hairy balls and so does Hawkeye!"

"I don't need to listen to this," said Marta, slamming the door behind her.

Cedric opened it again and shouted out, "And that quote doesn't even apply to this situation, you stupid cetacean!"

Steaming, Cedric went into the studio and squeezed his feet into his tap shoes. The right one got caught on the small bump at the base of his big toe. With an angry tug, he forced it on. He tapped for hours, stopping only to answer nature's call.

Hardly noticing the pain, he tore off the shoes and flopped into bed, physically exhausted but mentally abuzz. His friend's betrayal refused to leave his mind.

### 9. Injection

*As Gene jabbered away, I swung backward. I thought it was over when I kicked him. Luckily, he remained ignorant of my true goal. The metal lever behind me remained barely out of reach.*

*He turns to grab the second syringe. It's now or never. I kick my legs and feel the cool touch of the metal through my open back-fly. Thank God for Horseman's hastiness. My cheeks clench and hold the lever fast. I maintain my perch, waiting for the perfect time to pull. It slips away, slowly, slowly, slowly. My glutes are all that sits between the human race and extinction.*

*Gene finishes his mad speech, he grins, his hand draws back, and now.*

*I unclench and push the lever down, breathing a sigh of relief. The meat hooks jerk into motion, and Gene strikes nothing but air. He trips but manages to protect the syringe and its contemptible contents. We're safe for the nonce but not much longer.*

*Mere feet away, the meat slicer also begins to move. It whirrs and clacks, the sharp wheels and sharper knives spinning and poking. The first in line, I'm headed right for it. Suddenly, I jerk away. The track turns and turns again, prolonging my life for a few blessed moments. Two more turns follow, completing the S-shape. The whirring blades approach. I'm inches away from doom. If I go out, I'll do it like a man. "Mommy! Mommy! Mom--"*

*A tingle of electricity starts in my sphincter and goes up my spine. The machinery grinds to a halt on my skin, metal bending beyond redemption. I break the bonds that bind my hands and legs. Horseman nods at me. It turns out the world rested not only on my glutes but his penis. The tip was all he could give me, but it was enough.*

*With Horseman untied and reinserted, I break the bonds of the other prisoners easily. I lay Twink, unconscious from the stress of almost losing me, gently onto the floor. When I reach the pretty little number on the end, I pull out my business card and hand it over.*

*"If you ever want a good time or a vaginal exam, call me," I say with a wink, "Or both."*

*"I'm lesbian. You know that's why I'm here. Besides, you're no Tricky Dick," she replies.*

*"I don't take kindly to the suggestion that I'm a crook."*

*"Not a crook, definitely a creep."*

*"You're welcome for saving you, madam. I'd love to talk tits or sports with you some time," I say jerking my thumb back at Horseman, "Despite this arrangement, I'm the straightest guy around. No homo, man. Am I right?" The woman runs off into the distance, followed by the others. I shrug. She can't keep this hard-to-get act up forever.*

*"I'm not sure if that was rhetorical," says Horseman, "But this is homo for me."*

*I spin around. In all the chaos, I lost track of Gene. I was just in time. The bullets headed for Horseman hit me instead. Five shots bounce off my chest in quick succession. I rush forward, bending back my finger. I flick Wilder's chest. He flies back, slamming against a concrete wall. I stare into my hands and the crumbling wall, reveling in my newfound strength.*

*I see a jerk, hear a bang. Gene, grimacing in pain, holds up his pistol, aimed over my shoulder. I smile. "Missed me, muchacho?"*

*"I missed you," he says, "But I didn't miss."*

*Horseman slumps over and falls out of the harness. Gene throws the pistol. It grazes my temple, opening a small cut. When I look back up, he's a step away. He lowers his shoulder and drives me to the ground.*

*We grapple. Rolling around the floor, I get in a punch here and there, but he gets many more. His cellphone skitters out of his pocket, and I take solace in the fact that I've inconvenienced him that much. Using the last of my strength, I push myself on top. I strain for his neck, but his reach is longer. He tears me down the other way.*

*The floor is lumpy beneath me. It squirms too. Gene Wilder has his hands about my throat. His rough, undead skin chills me to the bone. On the brink of asphyxiation, I become a whole lot less comfortable and a whole lot more puissant. My lungs expand with the power of a typhoon. My nipples harden until they could cut diamond. My neck bulges like a fifth grader's pants in health class.*

*I lift Gene and slam him down. A steel support ripped from the wall will work fine for handcuffs. The beam bends like putty in my hands but is implacable around his.*

*"Good work," says Tiny Twink from over my shoulder. I turn to his bloody, smushed face and nod.*

*Gene laughs and laughs again. He laughs a truly villainous laugh. "Oh, Google," he says, "Start the fire." His phone, intact on the floor, gives a beep of acknowledgment. A blaze consumes the warehouse.*

*I pick up Horseman, comatose and bloody, with one hand and a still laughing Gene with the other. Surrounded by a ring of fire, we fly up through the ceiling. Outside, I set them down again.*

*Sirens blare. Police and firemen pour out of their vehicles to do their duty. A paramedic treats Horseman on site. His condition is too unstable to move him to a hospital. A sergeant takes our statements and another one Gene's. "So," I say to the policeman, "What do you suppose he'll get?"*

*"A big star like him? Just back from the dead? Probably an interview," he replies with a chuckle.*

*"But what about everything I just told you?"*

*"Not much evidence will be left after this fire, and that man has an impeccable public image."*

*Behind the sergeant's back, Gene pulls out the rainbow syringe. He jams it into his thigh and pushes down. I can't let him destroy the last of the evidence!*



*The sergeant falls as I rush past. I wrench the syringe from his grasp just in time. Only a quarter of the incredibly potent serum remains. Gene starts to shake and bubble. A blinding light shoots from his body. When it fades, everything has changed.*

*His eyes, like prisms, sparkle every color of the rainbow, and his hair is ROYGBIV-striped. His clothes melted off, and the carpet sure matches the drapes. "Oh my," he says with a little more oomph than usual, "I've become what I searched for. I am The Gay Gene."*

*The police all stare for a moment and burst into applause. The firefighters take a step back from the burning building and drop their hoses to hug and wipe the tears from their eyes.*

*"That was so brave of you!" shouts the sergeant.*

*"You're my idol, sir," says a policewoman.*

*"I wouldn't have believed you had the balls to do that, son. But now I can see they're larger than average," jokes the elderly Fire Chief, giving The Gay Gene a friendly pat in the crotch.*

*I look at the syringe, at the law enforcement duped by a murderer who had no choice but to come out of the closet, at Horseman bleeding out on the pavement. I know what I need to do.*

## 10. The Steel Cowboy

'Twas three nights before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. But when do they stir, anyway? Excepting *Ratatouille*, there is no evidence to support the hypothesis that rodents are sauciers. In any event, everyone in the house was still awake and not making soup. Mom and Dad argued over which show to fall asleep to, Ted used his one good hand to shape the shaft of his sculpture, and Cedric, well, he was stumped.

After hours of angry tap practice, he couldn't get to sleep, so he pulled his notebook off his bedside table and started writing. The words flew from his hands, quickly becoming sentences, paragraphs, pages. Until they didn't.

Only a few paragraphs left, max. It needed a positive ending. He wanted to be clear—he was making fun of homophobes, not homosexuals. *How does the story end?* He asked himself over and over. He was still asking when he drifted off to sleep.

Cedric awoke the next morning, actually early afternoon, with drool all over his notebook. Unlike Marta, he had no finals today and was free to stay home.

"Shit!" Cedric said, reaching for his phone, "Marta." He felt terrible about yesterday. Several calls and texts later, it was clear that she was either already taking the test or refusing to answer his calls. He sent one final text, "Good luck," figuring it couldn't hurt and dressed for the show.

His shirt went on without a problem. He stood up to get a pair of pants and nearly fell over. The pain in his right foot had reached new heights. The side of his big toe, which started with an abrasion, then a bump, now sported a massive lump. He thumped back into bed.

Several minutes later, WebMD diagnosed the lump as a bunion and recommended he make an appointment with his podiatrist, wear loose shoes, and rest it. Resting was not an option. He tried to slip a sock over it, but the constant pressure proved too much to bear.

*What to do? What to do? Holy homosexual, Batman!* Cedric had an idea.

Thirty minutes and six Tylenol later, a pair of dissected dance shoes lay at his feet and a pair of surgically enhanced flip-flops were on them. He glued the metal plates from an old pair of tap shoes to the sandals. An additional string tied around the center of each flipflop kept

them secured to his feet, but upside down, they would be a liability. *Better than nothing*. Their performance was in an hour and could not be delayed. Ted's art show started promptly at 4:30.

"Cedric! Your friend is here!" yelled his mother. He hurried downstairs, the pills beginning to work their magic.

"Marta!" he said as he neared the front door.

"It's alright. I got your messages. I forgive you," Marta said, "I brought the costume. Do we have enough time for a run-through of the catch before we perform?"

"About that..." said Cedric, pointing to his foot, "We're going to need to switch roles."

"Are you insane? You couldn't possibly hold me up." She grabbed her gut for emphasis.

"I'll have to. Go change. Quick! We can get a little practice in."

She hurried off to the bathroom.

"Wait!" he shouted, "The final, how'd it go?"

"I won't know until tomorrow. Let's focus on the recital for now."

Marta closed the door behind her. When she came out, she wore the black dress her mom bought for Cousin Hector's funeral and the sparkly, red cowboy hat Cedric bought from Walmart. They entered the tap studio and warmed up.

About to practice the somersault and catch, Cedric and Marta stopped abruptly. Dad stood in the doorway with Mom, Ted, Uncle Hank, and his cousins behind him.

"Change of plans. You need to start the routine now," said Dad, "Your brother wants to get to his erotic art show half an hour early."

"But Dad, we-"

"No buts, son. The show must go on."

Marta leaned over. "We've got this," she whispered.

Cedric nodded, and Ted came into the center of the room to do his duty as family MC.

"Please welcome our next act, 'I Am Gay', a tap duet from choreographer Cedric Farnsworth with music by Buddy Holly."

"Wait, what?" interjected Dad, but the music started before he could get an answer.

Cedric and Marta tapped out the first beats of the song and started to sing:

*I am gay, and a gettin' gayer,  
 Bangin' guys like a total player,  
 Love like mine is surely sodomy, (a-gay, a-gay, gay)  
 I am gay, a total flamer,  
 My fugly girlfriend, please don't blame her,  
 Love like mine is surely sodomy, (a-gay, a-gay, gay)*

Their feet synchronized like never before, truly tapping as one. The flipflops stayed on Cedric's feet, and, though they still had two minutes before the big finish, he felt amazing. More anxiety fell away with every word. His voice resonated off the walls and in his audiences' hearts:

*Every cock seems a little longer,  
 In my butt, love's a little stronger,  
 Come what may, I will always long for  
 P-ee-ee-nis  
 I am gay, and a gettin' gayer,  
 Bangin' guys like a total player,*

*Love like mine is surely sodomy, (a-gay, a-gay, gay)*

Now, the instrumental intermezzo. No singing, pure tap. Marta panted, sweat soaking through her dress, but kept tapping like her life depended on it. Cedric looked at his father's face, shocked but unimpressed. His eyes met Marta's, and they nodded. It was time.

Marta started to somersault, nimble despite her bulk. Cedric held out his arms to catch her and began to sing again:

*Every cock seems a little long-*

"Uhhhhhh," Cedric moaned as he caught Marta, chin at the belt buckle, and tried to keep his balance. Marta's weight pulled him forward, so he jerked back, trying to keep up his tapping.

He got in one final beat before his feet slipped out from under him. He toppled backward under Marta. A rib cracked when he hit the floor, the wind knocked out of him. In terrible pain, he lifted his head, only to get a faceful of his friend's sweaty groin. He put his head back on the floor, and they lay like that for a moment, Marta atop Cedric in a human heap.

Cedric's parents rushed over. They hauled up Marta with some effort, rescuing their son from what they had recently learned was an undesirable position for him. Marta sat down on a bench in the corner of the room, stunned but unharmed.

Cedric lay on the floor, surrounded by his family. With every breath, a knife drove into his lungs, but, somehow, he found the strength to speak, "See, Dad? I'm no T-t-twinkerbelle."

"No, son. You're certainly not."

## 11. Epilogue

Cedric lay in the hospital bed on Christmas morning. The pain of his broken ribs was under control, and his parents would be there in a few minutes to take him home. Marta called him yesterday, letting him know that she passed the final. He thought about his new friend. Really, his first friend. Nothing feels better than having a friend. Even when she's sweatily suffocating you. Now, he knew how the story ends:

*I look at the syringe, at the law enforcement duped by a murderer who had no choice but to come out of the closet, at Horseman bleeding out on the pavement. I know what I need to do.*

*My associate's pulse is fading fast. The Gay Gene stares at the syringe in my hand. It is the only hard evidence of his crime. Without it, he'll go free. But some things are more important than justice. Like compassion. And friendship. Horseman is more than my associate—he's my friend.*

*I plunge the needle into his heart, pumping it full of gay serum. His body spasms and falls to the floor, limp.*

*"What did you do?!" says a panicked paramedic, reaching for her defibrillator. She rubs the pads together, ready to shock her patient back to life. She puts them on his chest.*

*"Clear!" yells her assistant.*

*Horseman yawns. "What happened?" he asks, propping himself up on his elbows. The bullet wound in his chest vanished. Not even a scar.*

*"How?" asks the paramedic.*

*"Death spit Horseman right back out," I declare, "He couldn't handle the extra seasoning." My masculine voice, effortlessly seducing every woman within earshot, booms through the street, then across the city. Legend has it that my words reached as far as Santa Barbara. I place my hands on my hips, staring into the night sky heroically, "The Reaper is quite homophobic, you know."*

## Balls

Faith Marlboro didn't much like Daryl, so she shoved her elbow into his privates and kept on moving. That was one of the perks of being short — a knock to the balls didn't look like a foul. Which leads quite naturally to one of the perks of being female — he couldn't knock back.

As Daryl keeled over, Faith dribbled toward the hoop. She was about to lay it up when she heard heavy footsteps. She pump-faked and stuck her leg out behind her. Foot catching on the unseen impediment, her brother skidded across the blacktop. Faith briefly feigned interest before stepping back and sending up a crisp jumper from outside the paint. The net made a satisfying swish.

Porter, her older, stupider brother, fought back tears while holding his skinned knee. Not so tough, Daryl succumbed to the pain and moaned, cradling his swollen testes.

"Come and get it!" Their mother's shrill voice emanated from the kitchen window, each word a little closer to rupturing their eardrums than the last. Faith walked inside, leaving the boys moaning on the driveway.

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"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."

"Your last confession?"

"What 'bout it?"

"How long has it been, Hector? We've been here a thousand times!" The priest's agitated gesticulations rocked the confessional.

"You aren't s'posed to use names in here. It ruins the illusion of anemone."

"It's anonymity!"

"That's what I said!" shouted Hector. "I'll confess right now that you need to get a hearing aid."

The priest sighed and gritted his teeth. "When was your last confession?"

"Why, it was only yesterday. What'd ya need to ask me that for?"

Father Lenny Lewinski stood up and slammed the door of the confessional on the way out. He could only take so much idiocy in one weekend. Hector Running Horse, the only Sheriff's Deputy's Deputy in all of South Dakota (demoted by the Town Council after an unfortunate incident involving Aqua Velva, a kumquat, and John McEnroe's third cousin), always came to the Saturday service, confessed his sins after, and came back on Sunday "on accounts of the masturbation," a miracle he performed on himself every Saturday night while his wife was at book club. This week, Danielle Steel did it for both of them.

His confessions often came with graphic descriptions of his fantasies, from anal intercourse with "Bend Over Betty" from *Golden Girls* to anal intercourse with "Rip My Rear Rue," also from *Golden Girls*. Or, worst of all, a golden shower from the *Golden Girls*. While disturbing, these revelations did explain why he'd never sired a child.

Lenny strode into his office and flicked open the curtains to reveal a large stained-glass window. Light passed through the Son of God before settling on the most important thing in the world – his Billy Casper signed driver. Sure, Buffalo Bill wasn't as strong as Arnold Palmer and never made as delicious a beverage, but he had moxie in spades. Plus, he gave the dumb kid cheering for him at Pebble Beach an autographed club.



The driver really tied his decor together. The scattered books and papers; the bills spilling from the filing cabinet; last month's *WWJD<sup>†</sup> Magazine*, titled "Satan? More Like Gay-tan: Atheists Go Nuts Over Same-Sex Butts"; none of them would possess a jot, an iota, or even a smidgen of feng shui without the heavenly presence of the '65 Wilson Biltmore Driver, lying prostrate at the Lord's feet.

He rummaged through the closet, pushing past a stack of Bibles, before finally finding his *Golf Digest* hidden under last year's Christmas present from Hector. Lenny appreciated the sentiment, but the rube gave him an auger. When would he need to dig a post hole?

He reclined in his beat-up desk chair, enjoying the interplay of the shifting light and Tom Watson's luscious locks. As Lenny turned the page, he gasped. Stuck inside the magazine was the letter. He opened the envelope and felt the smooth, thick stationary between his fingers. This was definitely from the Bishop.

"Father Lewinski,

We regret to inform you that..."

There was no need to read any further. Another request denied. The tenth one in five years. His eyes began to water. It was starting to seem like he'd be forever confined to the boondocks.

*I might as well kill myself. Hell can't be any further from the links.*

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"Faith Marlboro, you get down here right now, young lady!" screamed her mother from the bottom of the staircase, "You are not gonna make your brother late for his game!"

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<sup>†</sup> Who Would Jesus Despise?

Faith trudged moodily down the hall from her room, the way only a sixteen-year-old girl can, and clomped down the stairs. It wasn't fair. Girls could play in Little League.

Porter already stood by the door in his perforated yellow tank top, brown short shorts, and blue converse. "Come on, stupid. I need to get to CYO. It's the first game of the season," he said.

"I hate it when you talk to yourself like that," said Faith. "It's dumb, anyway. Why go all the way to the church when you could just play here?"

"If it's so dumb, why'd you beg Mom and Dad to write letters to the Bishop to let you play too?"

"Shut up!" Faith turned to run back to her room, but her mother dragged her into the backseat of the old station wagon.

Soon, a tin box dressed up in wood paneling galumphed across the monotonous plains toward an inciting incident.

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St. Drogo's was big and small. It was big because it had to be, to fit God and the whole population of Wiseau, South Dakota every Sunday. It was small because the population of Wiseau was small (as in their population; not average height or weight, in which they bordered on obese), and God's attendance was metaphorical. The doors let past two normal townsfolk or one Buffington at a time, and they were bright green since the Spooner boys repainted them at the end of every summer. The siding was a weather-worn eggshell white, except near the bottom. It rotted out after the flood of '79 and was replaced with more expensive fiber-cement siding, courtesy of Lakota Hardware Toolery: *Where your tool is passionately serviced*. The roof

sported a small steeple with a cross on top. The cross stood for the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and all that. Also, because it was nailed very securely to the church's balloon frame structure.

The basement contained the gym, site of the highly anticipated tip-off of the CYO season — St. Drogo's of Wiseau vs. St. Rumwold's of Sidaris. Seated across the gym, next to Father Martinez of St. Rumwold's, Bishop O'Neill sported blue and white, the Rumwoldian colors, in a blatant show of favoritism. Lenny had half a mind to give him a piece of his mind, maybe even the whole other half.

During the third quarter, Martinez finally stopped schmoozing the Bishop, and Lenny made his move. "Bishop O'Neill, how nice of you to grace us with your presence on this fine afternoon."

"Ah, Father Lewinski. What a pleasure it is to see you again," said the Bishop, a septuagenarian with bright blue eyes, aquiline features, and a hairless dome waxed to a brilliant sheen. Blessed with orotundity, O'Neill's temper tantrums at the DMV sounded more sermonical than Lenny's palavers at the pulpit.

"Would you mind speaking in private for a moment?"

"And miss all of this action?" O'Neill asked, as Rumwold's star player, Mike Blackfoot, blew past Drogo's D yet again, finishing with a flashy reverse.

"Please, sir."

"If you insist, Leonard. I need to part the yellow sea in any case." He chuckled as he climbed out of the bleachers and headed into the visitors' locker room.

Lenny hurried to the Bishop's side, "I'm asking you to reconsider my request. Please. I don't fit in here. I can't shepherd a flock if I can't relate to the sheep."

"I'm sorry, son. I've told you many times — I can't spare you right now. If I let every young priest go wherever he wanted, we'd have a hundred parishes in Rapid City." O'Neill pushed open the door and walked through the changing room toward the urinals.

"I don't need to go to Rapid City, Bishop. Not even Pierre. Just closer to civilization than Wiseau." *Where there's civilization, there's golf.*

"Where there is God, there is civilization. Even a city slicker such as yourself should know that much."

"Wiseau is..."

Both men stopped and stared. On a bench sat Father Martinez. Before him knelt Denny Blackfoot, Mike's nerdy twin brother, and he was certainly not praying. (It is considered the height of impropriety to pray with one's mouth full in Wiseau.) Bishop O'Neill stepped forward and grabbed Denny around the shoulders, throwing him to the ground.

"Get out, Lewinski!" he whispered. As Lenny opened the door, O'Neill ensnared his left bicep in a vice-like grip. "Not a word to anyone. I will take care of this." Lenny nodded and the Bishop let go.

He heard the door lock behind him. In retrospect, Lenny was disappointed that the old cleric didn't drop dead on the spot, but unfortunately, having a heart is a prerequisite for a heart attack.

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Lenny stopped shaving. He stopped sleeping. He stopped taking confession. How could he absolve others when he himself overflowed with sin? Even without a razor's sharp kiss, most of his face remained thoroughly unhirsute. A thin layer of black whiskers hung limp over his upper lip.

A week after the incident, Lenny made the two-hour drive to the Bishop's residence, only to be brusquely told off and sent on his way. Unsatisfied, he drove another ninety minutes to Sidaris, finding kindly Father Chayton Shadowhunter seated in the church office where he expected to find Father Martinez.

"Lenny! Well, God has surely blessed me today," rasped the old man through the stoma in his neck, "But perhaps not you. Are you unwell?"

Lenny winced. He hadn't seen Chayton since the surgery. The man used to have a voice like a cool spring breeze, lilting through the air as he told jokes or sang hymns. Now, an epileptic bumblebee seized every time he opened his mouth. "I'm alright. How are you feeling?"

"Truthfully, terrible. I sound like Edith Bunker swallowing a chainsaw, and I haven't had a smoke in months."

"It's not that bad," replied Lenny, whose face belied his words. "I came here looking for Father Martinez."

"You're about a week too late. The grand and powerful Bishop Edmund O'Neill gave him my old parish in Deadwood and forced me out here. Something about better rehab facilities. Funny thing is, I haven't seen a single one in town," he coughed, "Excuse me, but I

have a meeting soon. Mrs. Blackfoot just sent her sons off to military school and is quite distraught. We can talk more after.”

“It’s alright,” mumbled Lenny as he hurried out the door.

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“I’m leavin’, Ma!” said Faith.

“Alright, sugar. Don’t forget to say thank you!”

Faith snagged her bag and shut the door behind her. She breathed in the South Dakotan winter. Her strides ate up the street as she hustled toward the warehouse, absorbed in anticipation. The golf lessons never failed to brighten up her week. It was the only time anyone treated her with respect she didn’t need to earn with her fists. At school, at home, even on the basketball court, nobody took her seriously. That’s why she liked Lensei so much. The master always said, “Here, it’s only you and the ball.”

Lenny smiled as his pupil walked into the abandoned warehouse. Formerly, it housed rat poison, mouse traps, and fly paper for Humane Xtermination LLC, until the FDA discovered the test orphans in the cellar. Now, it belonged to the three G’s - graffiti, goin’ at it, and golf. “A-hello, Faith-san,” said Lenny in his best Mr. Miyagi, “Are you a-ready for some golf?”

“Yes, Lensei,” Faith responded with a deep bow.

“Begin!”

Faith took out the club Lenny modified for her. He took one of his old pitching wedges, sawed off half a foot below the handle, and welded it back together, good as new. First, she went through her dynamic stretching warm-up (lunges, high knees, etc.) with the club held high over her head. Next, she began to take swings. Lensei stressed the fundamentals. Right

arm in on the backswing, head steady, shift your weight but remain poised, balanced, in control.

“In control, in control, in control...” she whispered to herself as she went through her swing over and over, maintaining perfect form. She swung for ten minutes before she realized she hadn’t heard one critique. Faith leaned the club against the wall and turned around.

Lenny’s tears rolled silently down his cheeks. They reached the end of his remarkably pointy chin and dropped onto his collar, making the white band wet and greyish in the fading light.

“What in the hell’s wrong with you?” asked Faith.

“My transfer request was denied again. Among other things.”

“Big deal. He denied my request to join the basketball league too. You don’t see me whining about it.”

“You wouldn’t understand.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t understand? I thought you were different from everyone else in this town, what with your city ways, but you’re just another sexist turd.”

“You don’t want to understand.”

Faith stormed out the door. She was halfway to the fence before she heard him.

“Wait!” he sighed before continuing, “You’re my only friend.”

“Either treat me like a friend and tell me or leave me alone.”

“I can’t.”

“Goodbye, then. See you never.” She walked away again, but only made it two steps this time.

“Alright. You want to know what the real world is like? I’ll tell you.” He proceeded to lay out the traumatizing events of the past weeks in excruciating detail.

“Thank you,” said Faith.

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Faith’s mind whirred with demonic machinations. She explained her plot to Lenny.

“Are you sure your brother wouldn’t do it?” asked Lenny.

“I’m better at basketball, and I’ll be better at this too. Besides, I’m the one who needs to blackmail this asshole.”

“It’s not about better or worse. It’s about male or female.”

“What’s the difference?” said Faith with an eye roll.

“I was wrong. It is about better or worse. Homosexual intercourse is worse. Especially in the Bishop’s eyes.”

“Won’t he be satisfied with statutory rape?”

“I’m not sure. That’s the problem.”

“So, I’m not good enough to play CYO or get raped?”

“Come on. You’re a great player, and I’m sure lots of guys would love to — eh .... Never mind — you know that’s not what this is about.”

“You’ll do what I say, the ‘rape’ will go off without a hitch, and we’ll both get what we want. End of story.”

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Preparing for a sexual assault turned out to be pretty much the same as preparing for a basketball game or a charity concert benefitting cancer-infested orphans; they got out there and



put in the work. Their ruse also required some putting out, but by and large, the principle remained the same: Practice makes perfect.

Lenny arranged for O'Neill to come as a guest speaker at next Sunday's mass. After every sermon, the Bishop liked to retire to the office and enjoy a flute of Chilean chardonnay. (It was standard practice in the diocese for priests to keep a bottle in their desks for just such an occasion.) This Sunday, Faith stayed behind after the service to perfect their execution.

Faith pointed to the small area she cleared off atop his cluttered desk. "Okay, so you sit up there, and I'll just grab it."

"Yes, but keep it covered by the pants." Lenny prided himself on his handiness. He took a length of PVC pipe, glued a whittled half-sphere to the top, and perforated the bottom so it could be sewn into his undergarments. The perfect stunt cock.

"Should I do anything else?" asked Faith, who also took pride in her handiwork.

Lenny looked like a deer in the headlights. "I don't know. I'm not exactly an expert in the field."

"Let's try it with me stroking, medium speed, and maybe you could throw in a guttural moan here and there? To really sell it, you know."

Lenny nodded, and she began to run her hand up and down his pipe. He worried about her hand chafing on the PVC. *Maybe they make some sort of lubricant for that.* "Uhhhh!" he moaned with artificial ecstasy.

"More from the back of your throat. We need this to seem as realistic as possible."

"Unghhhhhh!"

"Perfect."

“That’s actually pretty fun,” he said, “Ungh! Ungh! Ungh!”

A click came from behind Lenny, but neither noticed, so ensconced were they in their salacious subterfuge.

“Ungh! Ungh! Unnnngghhhhh!” Lenny finished. “That was pretty good! I had fun, and you’ve definitely got it down.”

A scruffy, overweight face peeked in the opened door.

“Are you passing a kidney stone or something in here, Father? I’ve learned the trick is to pretend Ms. White is waiting for me outside the bathroom. That way my body wants to get done real quick,” Hector said, “Anyway, I’ve been waiting a while, and I’ve got a whole tissue box worth of confessions if you know what I mean. Let me tell you, Big Booty Bea really had it going on last night.”

For the duration of Hector’s ramblings, Lenny and Faith remained frozen in their respective positions, petrified with shock and foreboding. Lenny sat next to the *Golf Digest* and Bible atop his escritoire, mouth open and pointy chin quivering. Faith kneeled next to the archaic armchair, hand still gripping the counterfeit cock in his priestly pantaloons. This was the tableau that greeted Hector as he circumnavigated the desk.

“Why, you pervert!” Hector said, once he’d processed the flabbergasting ocular stimuli which assaulted his visual cortex. He followed it up with a roaring right hook, licking Lenny right in the kisser. The priest toppled onto the floor, and Hector walked back around the table. He knelt on the small of Lenny’s back and slapped on the cuffs he always kept in his back pocket but never had occasion to use.

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“Give me one good reason I shouldn’t throw you in a cell with Freddy Hung Horse,” said Sheriff Oakthorn. He glanced down at the sizable tent pitched over Lenny’s crotch.

“Believe me you’ve got nothing on him.”

“I’ve told you! This was all just a big misunderstanding. If you’d just let me take off my pant—”

“There’s been enough of that today.” The Sheriff paced across the room and back before slamming his hands down on the metal table. The clang reverberated throughout the tiny space as Oakthorn leaned over him, stopping just short of his nose. Lenny could smell the chewing tobacco hiding behind his lower lip. “Do you know how Freddy got his appellation?”

“I think I can intuit that, yes,” said Lenny.

“And you know what he does with kiddie diddlers?”

“I do.”

“Then I’d start talking if I were you.”

Before Lenny could respond, a slam echoed through the station.

\*\*\*\*\*

The common area was the only other room in the station. There, Faith lay on the malodorous brown sofa, covering the stain that looked like a mogwai from *Gremlins*. However, a gremlin horde would be easier to deal with than her mother.

The Marlboro matriarch burst through the station door like a whirlwind without much respect for wood. “Honey, are you okay?! What has that man been doing to you? I’ll rip his fucking throat out!”

“Ma, it’s not what you think.”

"Don't you go defending him."

"I'm serious. If they'd just let him take his pants off—"

"The only way his pants are coming off is if I'm standing over him holding a knife!"

"Mother, I did not have sexual relations with that man," Faith said. She proceeded to explain the whole situation.

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Bursting through another wooden door, nary a thought for its well-being, Mrs. Marlboro forced the Sheriff against the wall, varicose veins threatening to pop from her stick-thin arms.

"You've got an innocent man here, Sheriff."

"Innocent?"

For the third time, the series of events that led up to the current point was explained.

"...And that's why you should be arresting Bishop O'Neill and Father Martinez right now."

"I'll alert the departments in Rapid City and Deadwood." The sheriff shrugged. "I don't need all the paperwork."

He turned to address Lenny. "You're free to go. Hector's handcuffs don't really lock, so you can let yourself out."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It's been fourteen days since my last confession."

*Apparently, even morons can learn,* Lenny thought. "Unburden yourself and accept salvation, my son."

“Last night, Dorothy and Rose were really going at it, and boy, you know how that gets my blood up, among other things. So, I pulled it ou—”

“Excuse me, Hector, but don’t you have something else to confess?”

“I did punch a priest last week. Oh yeah, that was you, Father. Sorry ‘bout that.”

“It’s alright. I absolve you of your sins.”

The men stepped out of their respective booths in the confessional and looked at each other. The young, clean-shaven priest with a few missing teeth and the middle-aged, scruffy nitwit with abraded knuckles. Abruptly, Hector opened his arms and engulfed Lenny in a spine-crushing embrace.

“You’re all good, right?” asked Hector.

“I’m fine,” replied Lenny, shaking the big man off him, “but I still can’t play golf without driving halfway across the state.”

“Just use your auger.”

Lenny sighed. Hector could learn, but you can’t teach IQ. “Buddy, I really appreciate your gift, but I can’t play golf with it.”

“Of course, you can’t,” said Hector. A perplexed expression twisted his weather-worn features. “But you can dig perfectly circular holes with it. I figured with all the unoccupied land we got ‘round here, you could make yourself your own course. It was all in the card. Didn’t you read the card?”

“It must’ve gotten lost in the mail,” said Lenny, studying the grain of the hardwood floor.

“Darn, I could’ve sworn I delivered that myself. That explains why you haven’t been doing it, then. Not everybody can be so smart as me.” As Hector trudged out of the bright green doors and into the light snow, Lenny’s grin brushed up against his earlobes.

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Faith dribbled between her legs, faked a pass to the right, and nailed a fadeaway jumper. Running back on defense, she high-fived her brother with a smile. Mike Blackfoot, back from military school after Father Martinez’s arrest, broke her brother’s ankles and drove toward the hoop. Faith planted her feet, covered her groin with her arms, and stood in the lane. She flew backward when he made contact, sliding across the gym floor faster than a kiddie diddler’s soap during an encounter with Freddy Hung Horse.

The whistle’s shrill shriek filled the gym. “Charge, 22, blue. Yellow ball!” said the ref, holding up two fingers on each hand. The Wiseau bleachers burst noisily into life.

They were down 42-44 going into the final ten seconds of the North-Central Regional CYO Championship. Faith took the inbound and dribbled up the court. She needed to make this shot, but Mike stuck to her like glue. He was faster, and she couldn’t get over him. “5, 4, 3...” chanted the crowd.

She saw him. Daryl wide open for the corner three. All her animosity melted away in that moment. She passed the ball.

“2, 1, ehhhhhhhhhhh!”

As the buzzer sounded, the ball swished through the net. The crowd rushed onto the court and lifted Faith and Daryl onto their shoulders. In her moment of bliss, she forgot about the PVC, and it conked her brother on the head.

"I hate your stupid new dick!" he yelled over the roar of the crowd.

It was easy to convince the new Bishop to let her play with the boys now she had a Bunyanesque bulge in her pants.

## Square Peg, Round Hole

Stan Persnickety never quite fit in. His limbs were long and gangling like his appendages couldn't get far enough away. He had a small head with big ears and an unparalleled love for peanut butter and mayonnaise sandwiches. He could spend hours lying on bare earth, sketching a single blade of grass. But the wonderful thing, the beautiful thing about Stanley Tiberius Persnickety was that he never wanted to fit in.

During recess, other children would attempt to torment him. They shouted and sneered, but none of their words touched the pure heart of our friend Stanley. Sometimes they tried to hit him. This did not end well for them. Stan's limbs shot out like so many GMO'ed worms from a cannon. The bullies found themselves on their rear ends several feet away before they got close to touching Stan. Even in deep concentration, Stan had a second sense about such things. Before they regained their footing, he returned to his work, happy as a clam on Xanax.

Stan met the woman who would change his life ten years ago, on the first day of eighth grade. He sat in the back of his math class, drawing his first human. No one had ever caught his attention before. She sat two rows in front of him. She wore an aquamarine turtleneck that brought out her green eyes and contrasted the dark, curly hair that twisted its way down to her shoulders. Her face was angular and harsh, belied only by the twinkle of mischief shining in her eyes. As the teacher droned, Stan drew. The class filed from the room, and he followed. More accurately, Stan followed her, timing his packing with hers so they exited together. Once they left the room, she turned, noticing Stan for the first time. She saw his extended, arachnoidian frame and, embedded in his little head, a pair of kind eyes. She smiled. Stan smiled too. She



pointed back toward their teacher, a pallid, dull old man with a walrus mustache and chronic constipation.

“He sure looks like he has a stick up his butt,” she said. Stan kept smiling and nodded.

“I’m Emily, by the way. Emily Bellend.”

“I’m Stan,” said Stan.

Stan pondered this interaction the rest of the day. The more he thought about it, the more it confused him. Having a stick up his butt didn’t sound half bad. In fact, it sounded like a real treat. The more he thought about it and the more he thought about her, the worse his pants seemed to fit. The discomfort this caused the other boys after gym class, he did not notice.

That night, Stan discovered the joys of masturbation. Good for him.

Of course, Stan attempted to shove a stick up his own butt, but a few splinters later, he decided it was a fruitless pursuit. He needed another object, and he needed help. There was only one person he wanted to help him. But Emily thought it was bad. This made Stan sad.

Years passed. Emily kept talking to Stan. They became friends. They became best friends. Finally, they became more than best friends. Emily taught Stan to pay attention to other people, to consider them. Stan taught Emily not to pay them too much attention. They went to prom together. They went to college together. They shared their deepest, darkest secrets. Except for one. Stan could never quite voice this desire, resonating so strongly in his heart, soul, and B-hole. They graduated. They cohabitated. Stan sank to one knobby knee and proposed. Still, he longed for her to really get up there. They married.

It is Stan and Emily's honeymoon. They are in Santa Barbara. She reclines on the bed, while he stands at the foot, sketching her as he's done a million times before. Emily's champagne glass wobbled slightly as she spoke.

"Anyways, I was talking to other Emily last weekend--"

"Bitchy other Emily or work other Emily?" he said.

"Honey, bitchy other Emily *is* work other Emily," said OG Emily.

"Oh," said Stan.

"Like I was saying, we were talking, and apparently she and her husband tried something on their honeymoon that really brought them closer together..." she trailed off and looked shyly into his eyes.

"You didn't finish talking," said Stan.

Emily blushed. "It's just a little embarrassing to bring up."

"Nothing will change how I feel about you," Stan said, continuing to draw. "Except a brain injury of some sort or hypnotic conditioning or the dispassionate monotony that often comes after decades of married life. This isn't one of those things."

"Your bedside manner could use some work."

"I'm not a doctor."

"Good," she said. "Any who, what they did was...well...a bit of a role reversal."

"You want to draw me now?"

"No, honey, no. You know I'm godawful at art."

Stan nodded. "You are certifiably terrible. I am objectively very good. Your uncontested superior."

"That's enough," she said with a stern expression. She held it for a moment before laughing. Stan laughed too. Emily taught him all about humor. He still didn't "get it" sometimes. But this time he did. Funny. "No, so the role reversal was more of one in the bedroom if you know what I'm saying."

Stan nodded his understanding. "She tucked in the sheets while he fluffed and arranged the pillows. Yes, that would help me understand your perspective. Let's try it." He put down the sketchbook and picked her up. He held her in one arm like a football before setting her down next to the bed. A vast reserve of strength lurked in his wiry arms. "So what I normally try to do is get the sheets really far stuck under there, so they won't come out unless we really, really want them to. Sometimes, you have to lift the mattress a little because the sheets get caught on the lip--"

"No, no, no, Stanley," started Emily.

"Yes, but they do get caught on the lip sometimes.

"Okay, Stanley, but that's not what I was talking about."

"You don't want to do this now? I thought you wanted us to get closer. You suggested this," Stan said. "I don't understand."

Emily shook her head in frustration. "Clearly, honey. This is not what other Emily and her husband did on their honeymoon. It was--"

"Ohhhhh! So they did both tasks together, so they definitely had an equal share in how neat the room looked when they left. That could be very satisfying."

“No, Stanley! No!” Emily’s face turned red. “She f#^%&\* him! She f#^%&\* him in the f#^%!<\* @\$\$!” Emily released a long breath after the last syllable, the frustration draining out of her. “Sorry for yelling.”

Stan’s face broke into a Cheshire grin. “That sounds lovely.”

“Really, honey?”

Stan nodded vigorously.

Emily thought for a moment. “Well, all we really need is a strap-on c@<%. I saw a sex shop down a mile or so down the street as we uber-ed in.”

“I’ve got it!” Stan said as he sprinted for the door, grabbing his wallet and throwing on his shoes in a frenzy. “You just stay here and warm up your hips!”

With that, Stan slammed the door behind him, leaving his wife in a state of shock. Stan’s grin did not slacken as he dashed through the hall, slid down the banister, and vaulted into the lobby. Nor did it droop as he mounted the tandem bicycle they rented for the week and pedaled for the sex shop. He swerved through Santa Barbaran traffic like a full-scrotumed Lance Armstrong. His sixth sense served him well, and whenever danger approached, he was nowhere to be found.

Mom and Pop’s Sex Shop announced its presence to the world with an enormous billboard, adding another story of height to their squat, brick storefront. It proclaimed in large, vermilion font: *Hump ‘til you drop with Mom and Pop!* Above the writing, a pair of cherubs with the faces of an elderly couple aimed phallic arrows at a younger couple.

Stan pushed the door open and stepped in. Elaborate erotic art covered the walls, much of it nabbed from the pages of the Kamasutra. The shelves overflowed with apparatuses of

every shape, size, and color. Stan stumbled through the shop, astounded by this chaotic capitalization of pleasure. He remained, however, focused on his goal. In a plastic bin on the middle row of an inauspicious oak shelf, Stan glimpsed his prize. Of respectable length and girth, the crystalline member extended from the center of a wrinkled belt of genuine Italian leather. A beam of sunlight shot through it, refracting into a kaleidoscopic display on the plastic packets of celebrity semen below. A particularly beautiful fleur-de-lis flashed briefly atop Wallace Shawn's inconceivably viscous goo.

"We source the finest bull scrotums in all Italia for our strap-on belts! For extra potency!"

Stan spun around, nearly taking out the old man behind him. No one had ever gotten that close before. Not without him sensing it. The man was short, wizened, and spoke with a Midwestern twang. A second later, an old woman joined him, materializing next to her husband. Both wore robes of translucent white silk. Strange symbols wrapped their way around each of their bodies, terminating at their necklines. As Stan watched, the symbols seemed to shift, each movement sending little waves of arousal through his body.

"It is he, Pop," Mom rasped.

"Right you are, Mom. Boy, you must travel with us to Nepal. Forthwith!"

Stan found himself at a loss for words, but after a moment, his brain spluttered back into motion. "No, no, no. My wife is waiting for me in our hotel. I just need to buy this so she can f#^% me in the @\$\$ with it."

"Any other time, boy, we would be more than happy to oblige, but you are in grave danger," said Pop, wagging his finger at Stan's chest.

"You have seen the signs," said Mom, "You have seen them wind and grind across our pruney flesh. Your mortal eyes took in the divine, and now you are chosen."

Pop took over. "Ah Kin Mai will hunt you now. To the ends of this Earth will he go to put an end to your pleasure. To put an end to the Universe."

Stan shook his head. "You don't understand. I just want to buy this." He pulled out his wallet and extracted several portraits of Ben Franklin. "This should cover it. Bye!"

Stan turned his back on them, rushing out the door. The couple lifted off the floor. Pure white light shone from their orifices. "You must wait, youth!" they shouted. "You must come with! In Bangri La only can you prepare in safety for the perils to come!"

Stan paid them no heed. He shoved the strap-on in his back pocket, jumped on the tandem bicycle, and pedaled for home. Cars and trucks zoomed by on either side of him. A few swerved toward him as he rode, but always he sensed and avoided them. *Some people are having a fun Friday night. I guess buzzed driving really is drunk driving,* thought Stan. Traffic lightened up near the hotel, and Stan relaxed as he pulled up the drive.

A sudden intuition. He pedaled for the curb. The tires of an Utz pretzel delivery truck squealed up the street behind him. His lanky legs gave it their all. The front wheel plonked up the curb and onto the sidewalk.

Many people believe that the real danger of riding a tandem bicycle is the danger of someone you know seeing you on a tandem bicycle. For Stan, the danger turned out to be getting hit by a truck.

Before the back wheel of the tandem could clear the curb, the Utz driver slammed into it. Stan flew off the bike, flipping head over heels through the air and landing on the edge of the

hotel's second-story Spanish tile roof. He broke a bank of tiles on impact, sending up a puff of red clay dust. Miraculously, Stan seemed alright. He stood up and dusted himself off. He waved down at the Utz driver.

"Don't worry about it! I'm fi-"

The squawk of an enormous white pelican cut him off. Stan turned around to see the avian furiously flapping for him, its ten-foot wingspan furling and unfurling. The pelican let something drop from its mouth as it zoomed for his head. Stan ducked, and the bird's claws barely grazed his scalp.

"That was ineffective, bird!" said Stan with a raised fist.

He took a step up the roof.

His foot landed on a slick tile, soaked by the billful of sea water the pelican let drop. Stan slipped backward, scrabbling desperately for purchase. His heel caught on the gutter, and he tumbled off the roof. Stan landed with a *CRACK* on the sidewalk below. He felt his vertebrae shatter like so many Spanish tiles, his head bonked the sidewalk, and all went dark.

Stan didn't fit on a traditional hospital bed. Interns took turns holding up the superfluous portion of Stan's legs. Emily sat by his bedside, sick with worry. *If he didn't want to please me so bad, she thought, this never would have happened. It's my fault.*

"Nonsense, girl," said an aged female voice. Emily spun around. An elderly couple in thick robes stood behind her. "This responsibility rests on other shoulders."

"The shoulders of Ah Kin Mai." The old man spit on the hospital floor after speaking the name.

"Sorry, but who the f#^% are you? And what the f#^% are you talking about?"

The old man started, "We are the guard--"

The old woman put a hand on his shoulder, stopping him. "You can call us Mom and Pop."

"And how do you know my husband?"

Pop laughed. "You can say we've known him since the beginning."

"And will know him until the next," said Mom.

"The beginning of what?" said Emily.

Mom looked at her like a teacher looks at their worst student. "Why, everything, of course."

During their exchange, Pop meandered to Stan's bedside and laid a finger on his head.

"The boy's mind and soul are intact. Enough. We may succeed yet."

Mom bustled past a confused Emily. She made her way to the opposite side of the bed.

"It's wake-up time."

Mom and Pop nodded to each other. They flipped Stan onto his stomach, and the hospital gown fell open to expose his rather bony posterior. They took a step back and stood facing each other. A symbol snaked its way off their arms and onto their hands, Pop's right and Mom's left. They raised their arms.

Emily jolted to life. "Hey! What the h#!! are--"

Too late. Mom and Pop brought their hands down in a synchronized arc, each slapping a cheek. They slowly lifted their hands. Emily saw the symbols dance around Stan's glutes for a second before Mom and Pop flipped him back over.

"You can't just go slapping my husband's @\$! Who do you think you are?"



Mom and Pop stared back at Emily, simply gesturing to Stan's limp form.

"Yes, I know my husband is lying there and may never--"

With a gasp, Stan's eyes flashed open. He looked around, catching Emily's eye first. She ran to his side and threw herself on him.

"Honey, I'm so glad you're okay!"

"I love you," said Stan.

As they hugged, he continued to scan the room. He saw Mom and Pop next. They beamed down at him with unsettling grins.

"You people are crazy. I barely know you. Please stop staring at me and leave."

"I follow the whims of a creature much greater than yourself, boy," said Pop.

Emily released him. "Stanley, who are these people?"

"They own the sex shop. Where I bought the strap-on for you to--"

"Okay," said Emily, blushing. "I get it."

Stan's eyes fell on the intern, holding his feet so they wouldn't drop off the bed. He was a pimply, redheaded teenager with a bad case of tech dependence. He wore a pair of headphones and stared at his phone, balanced on Stan's shins.

"An adolescent is holding my legs. Why can't I feel it? Why can't I feel his mobile telephone on my shins?"

"Well..." said Emily.

Pop cackled. "It's real simple, boy. You're paralyzed from the waist down."

Mom gave a small smile. "Your physical pathways will never function there again."

Stan began to cry.

Emily rubbed his back. "Oh honey, it's okay. There are surgeries and therapies and you can get a wheelchair. It'll be just fine."

Stan shook his head and spoke between sobs. "You don't understand. Now, I can never feel it. I was so close, and I'll never feel it. Never feel the stick up my butt." He slumped back and let his head fall to the side. His sobs grew and grew until they wracked his whole chest, sending vibrations down legs that would never again shudder of their own volition.

Pop put his hand on Stan's shoulder and squeezed. Hard. Stan's sobs faded.

"That hurts," said Stan. "Stop. I just fell two stories and broke my back."

"It's not how we fall, it's how we stand back up that defines us."

"What if how you fall prevents you from ever standing back up?"

"Then stop being a whiny baby," said Pop. "The Universe depends on you."

"What do you mean?" asked Emily.

"All will be revealed in Bangri La," they answered together.

Mom reached out her hand to Stan. "Take my hand. It is time to go. Time to save the Universe."

Stan felt a wave roll through his mind. Danger lurked, and the only way to avoid it was to join them. He looked at his wife. She was bewildered. "I'll go with you, but we need to take Emily, too."

Mom looked at her. "Sorry, but you'll have to stay here."

Stan opened his mouth to object.

Pop squeezed his clavicle again, harder. "The girl is insignificant, boy! Leave her or let everything we know perish!"

Stan kissed Emily on the lips and took Mom's hand. "I'm sorry, honey," he said as they disappeared in a brilliant flash of white light. The intern's phone dropped from Stan's legs, and the screen cracked beyond repair on hospital tile. He stared in disbelief and collapsed next to it. Emily took a few moments to process what had happened.

She put her head in her hands and began to cry. At the same moment, tears ran down the intern's cheeks, weaving between fresh razor bumps and pimples like tiny mogul skiers. They mourned together, bonded by the loss of the thing they loved most in the world. The next day, the intern bought a newer model from a cellular telephone retailer. He was fine. Emily was not. Emily was taken, snatched, abducted. Ah Kin Mai trussed her up and carted her off. The villain smiled as he did.

Pop and Mom flashed back into existence in a crowded airport terminal with Stan between them. All wore practical traveling clothes, and as Stan fell from their arthritic grasp, he plopped into a wheelchair. Pop grabbed the handles and began to push.

"Wrong way, dear," said Mom. She glanced down at their tickets. "We're C16."

"C16 is this way!"

"No, dear. The sign says this way."

As they argued, Stan began scratching his leg. It itched terribly, but no amount of scratching did any good. He lifted it for a better angle, or he tried to. Stan told his leg to lift, and he felt his leg lift, but there it remained, limp on the chair's stirrup. *Phantom limb syndrome*, he thought.

"But my sign says- Oh. That's C6. Darn cataracts."

"Don't fret, dear. We'll make it with time to spare."

Stan stopped scratching and chose this moment to pipe up. "Why didn't you take us direct to Bangri La? Or at least the right terminal of the airport?"

Mom smiled. "Bridging oceans is not among our many skills."

"Nor is navigating airports," said Pop.

After some time, they reached gate C16. The crowd parted for the three of them, and they hobbled up to the ticket attendant. He scanned them in, and they boarded the plane. Mom and Pop wrestled Stan into a first-class seat and buckled him in. "Rest, boy, for you will need all your strength at Bangri La."

Stan tried to protest but found this task impossible. He sank into an unshakable slumber. Stan did not even stir several hours later when his companions celebrated their newfound membership in an exclusive altitudinal society.

When he finally awoke, he was back in the wheelchair on the streets of a strange, new city. The denizens donned a mix of Western and traditional Nepalese garb, and a miasma of exotic spices, incense, and internal combustion exhaust filled the air. The barks of dogs melded with those of their owners to form the top layer of a cacophonous confection that also included car horns, jackhammers, and moped motors.

"Welcome, boy," said Pop, "to Kathmandu."

"Ah," sighed Mom as she pointed to a tall beige building, "here lie our dwellings."

They wheeled him through the sliding glass doors.

"Welcome, boy," said Pop, "to the Marriot Hotel and Conference Centre, Kathmandu."

The hotel décor was aggressively bland. The same facility could fit as easily in Vladivostok or Peoria, Illinois. Mom and Pop left Stan by the conference hall while they

checked in. Stan took in his beige surroundings, wheeling himself around to view the hall. He started cursing. Mom and Pop snatched their keys from the clerk and hurried over to Stan.

“Pull yourself together, boy!” said Pop. “We don’t need a scene.”

“Bangri La isn’t some mystical place of power!” Stan pointed at the sign in front of the conference hall. “It’s a ‘Global Sex Shop Owners’ Convention with a Twist’.”

“Oh, come now,” said Mom, pushing open the door. “Think you so little of our twist?”

The door opened onto a hidden grove within the hotel, a green paradise. Sunlight shone down, and the smells and sounds of the city evaporated. The symbols beneath Mom and Pop’s robes writhed excitedly and glowed gold. A huge Buddhist temple rose from the grove’s center. Vines of ivy twisted up the hotel walls that surrounded it, sparing only the door that swung shut behind them. Statues of human-animal hybrids in various sexual positions surrounded the temple. On a pedestal in the center of the temple’s fountain, knelt the Buddha. Behind him, a woman prepared to thrust. Stan wheeled himself beside the fountain and stared. Mom and Pop walked up beside him.

“That’s the Buddha about to get pegged,” said Stan. “What is this place?”

“This,” said Pop, “is Bangri La. The sacred sanctuary of the Universe’s destined guardians.”

“Who-”

“We know you have many questions,” said Mom, “but please let us speak.”

Stan nodded, staring now at the magnificent mahogany dildo perpetually perched mere inches from the Buddha’s anus.

Mom started again. "We, child, are the Universe's destined guardians. When the Universe is young and healthy, so are we. When it is decrepit and on its last legs," she eyed his lower body for a moment and coughed, "so to speak, so are we."

"The Universe is dying, boy. By now, humans have figured out its birth. In the beginning, there was light. The Big Bang. Well, what they don't know is that the Universe needs another Big Bang, every once and a while. A reboot of sorts. Without a nice Big Bang, the Universe will die not the little death, but the big one."

Mom took over. "Ten years ago, we felt the Universe shudder. We knew we had to find the one who could save us, the Power Bottom. We searched everywhere, but everywhere we looked, we were thwarted."

"Thwarted, boy," said Pop, "by Ah Kin Mai, the Mayan high priest. Millenia ago, his people predicted that the world would end in 2012, and he is willing to do anything to fulfill it. He sees each passing year as a giant dookie on the legacy of his people. His powers are strong. It was he who tried to run you off the road, he who forced the Utz driver's foot down on the pedal, and he who changed the course of that fateful pelican. It was he, and his forebears, who drove the Universe to the edge of death in 2012. For the past ten years, we have held it together with naught but willpower and Italian scrotal leather."

Mom gestured to the statue of the Buddha about to get pegged. "Our old friend here was the last Power Bottom. Nearly 2500 years ago, he saved the Universe. Now, it's your turn."

"You can see the message scrawled across our hides, the ever-changing story of the Universe hidden from all other beings but ourselves. You, boy, are the Power Bottom, and your pleasure will save us all."

Stan took a moment to process all this before saying, "This won't work. I lost feeling and mobility in my lower appendages. Pleasure is not in the cards for me."

Mom wheeled Stan in front of a full-body mirror set into the sidewall of the temple. Stan flinched as he met his own gaze. Instead of his figure, an electric blue shadow sat in his chair. Stan waved his hand in the air, and the blue shadow mimicked him.

"That is not normal," said Stan, pulling his notebook from his pocket and beginning to sketch.

"That is your soul," said Mom. "Do you see its legs?"

"Half of them," said Stan. The soul's legs disappeared at the knee. After several moments, he noticed their slow recession toward his waistline. "They're disappearing."

"You best work quick, boy," said Pop. "If you let your soul eclipse your anus, you condemn the world to a fate most heinous."

Both gestured to the wooden accouterment poised behind the Buddha. Light poured from their mouths as they spoke in unison. "Claim your destiny."

The mahogany device unstrapped from the statue's waist. It floated through the fountain's spray and hovered in front of Stan, dripping. The viscous drops of paranormal lubricant faded before they hit the ground, evaporating like dew around 10:30 a.m. He cocked his head slightly and nodded. His long left arm reached out and grabbed it by the shaft. The dildo of destiny emitted a bright burst of light before falling into his lap. The wood felt moist but did not stain Stan's trousers.

Mom and Pop fell back to the ground. Pop rounded on Stan. "Now, get to banging, boy. Big time."

Stan looked down, tears in his eyes. Finally, his dream, his lifelong fantasy, his stinky little kink was coming to fruition. Then, like the sticks of yesteryear, it splintered apart. "How?" he asked.

"Find someone and do it. Pay them, even," Pop said. "Get to it, boy."

"There's only one person I ever wanted this with," said Stan. "And I left her behind because you said she was irrelevant."

"Your wants matter not," said Mom. "The Universe needs you."

Stan's knuckles turned white, and the metal arm of his chair crunched under the strain.

"Fine," said Stan. "Give me some cash."

Mom handed over 10,000 rupees. Stan ripped them away and wheeled back to the wooden door peering out of the greenery. He slammed it behind him as he left.

Stan traversed the banal lobby, entering an equally dull hotel bar. He rolled up to a swarthy, mustachioed man wearing a puffy fur coat and seven heavy gold chains, all with dollar signs a-dangling. "Are you a purveyor of human flesh?" Stan asked.

"Yes," said the man with a heavy Brooklyn accent. "But I'm off-duty. Took a few days off to climb Everest. Can ya believe that?"

"I don't care," Stan said. He moved on to a scantily clad bleach-blonde woman, sitting alone at the bar. "Hello. Are you a prostitute?"

The woman looked him up and down with little amusement. "Does liking how I look in a nice dress," she gestured down at her sequined gown, "make a woman a prostitute?"

"No," said Stan, "accepting money in exchange for sex makes anyone a prostitute."

"Yeah," she sighed. "I do that too."



Stan nodded and held up the sopping mahogany strap-on. "Coolio. Care to take this puppy up to my room and f#^% me with it?"

Her eyes went wide. "How much you paying?" she asked.

"10,000 rupees," he said.

She snatched the strap-on from his hands and took off across the lobby. "Sorry!" she yelled over her shoulder. "I already got a better offer."

Stan wheeled furiously after her, using every muscle in his elongated arms. Luckily, the woman could not keep a good clip wearing six-inch heels. She shoved past a honeymooning couple wearing matching Hawaiian shirts in a non-tropical destination and ran out the door. The couple fell, one atop the other across the pathway. Stan couldn't slow down. He gave the crinkled armrests a strong jerk, sending the chair airborne. He twisted sideways in mid-air, skimming across the top honeymooner's shirt. He landed roughly, skidding briefly to halt.

"Hey!" shouted the top honeymooner, standing and holding up his skid-marked floral shirt. "You owe me \$74.99! This is a Tommy Bahama!"

"Here!" said Stan and tossed him the 10,000 rupees. The throw went wide, knocking the man's husband backward. He tripped over a crack, falling spine-first onto a running chainsaw. The man gurgled blood and died atop the spinning blade.

"That's another \$74.99!" the honeymooner called, but Stan was long gone. He wheeled into the street, following the prostitute as she weaved through mopeds, cars, and occasional livestock. Stan reached the other curb just steps behind. She pushed past another pair of honeymooners in matching Hawaiian shirts and into the Kathmandu Hilton. They fell

backward into a construction site, where their island flora and fauna were pulverized by jackhammers. Frankly, Stan was grateful she saved him the trouble.

The prostitute ran to a man at the bar wearing an elaborate feathered headdress studded with jade, a golden torc, and an ornamented leather loincloth. Red and green body paint coated his hairless, muscular body in complex patterns. The man took the dildo and smiled. With his other hand, he reached casually into her chest and removed her beating heart. He spotted Stan wheeling towards him and unleashed a meaty fastball. Stan pulled the right handbrake, turning his chair 180 degrees. The heart zoomed past and thudded into the gaping maw of another tourist, this one donning a neon Hawaiian shirt with the sleeves cut off. The man died months later from the blood-borne venereal diseases squirting down his throat.

Stan stared at the gaudy headdress and loincloth. "Ah Kin Mai," he whispered. The Mayan priest sprinted across the lobby to the elevator. Stan followed, crashing into the elevator doors that slid shut in front of him.

"Damn!" Stan didn't know how much time he had until his soul receded past his anus. He righted himself and watched the numbers alight above the door. 3...4...5...6. The elevator stopped. Stan slammed the button until the doors reopened. He wheeled himself in and pressed 6. The doors rumbled closed, and Stan enjoyed forty-two seconds of muzak. When he reached the sixth floor, Stan followed the red body paint footprints to room 617.

Stan nudged open the door. The hinges creaked loudly. He saw no one, no more footprints, and wheeled all the way in. He glanced around the room, into a heretofore unseen corner. There sat Emily, bound and gagged. Stan rushed over and pulled off the ropes.

"I'm so sorry. You will never be irrelevant to me."

"Behind you!" she said, pointing upward.

Stan spun as Ah Kin Mai dropped from the ceiling. He smiled an alabaster smile.

"The jig is up, gringo," said the Mayan priest with a slight Mexican accent. He held up the sexual aide in triumph. "Your people will no longer make a fool of the Mayans!"

"Please," said Emily, "I told you. We haven't done anything to your people."

"Your husband's very existence is an insult to my people. The world should have ended in 2012! I kidnapped your wife for insurance, but now that I have the sacred strap-on, all I have to do is wait a few more minutes."

Emily rolled her eyes. "He can go on forever."

"Do you have any idea how humiliating it is," he continued, "when the whole world thinks your ancestors were a bunch of dinguses? Do you?!"

"I'd never considered it," said Stan.

"We put out that whole story about the calendar resetting, but no one really bought that B\$. Large-scale genocide is one thing. But invalidating our prophecies is quite another. Failed fortune tellers are f#^%!&\* punks! This world must die, or my ancestors will live in eternal ignominy."

"No one cares!" said Emily. "Like every ancient culture and religion was wrong about things! Nobody fucking cares!"

"No! Everyone is always looking at us, judging us!" Ah Kin Mai said.

"I told you! You just have social anxiety. It's nothing to be ashamed of," said Emily.

"Cállate la boca, p#^@!" said Ah Kin Mai. "I am a great coversationalis-"

The door burst open, knocking Ah Kin Mai to the ground. The strap-on flew out of his hand, end over end. It arced toward a window, open to the city below. Stan launched from his chair. His lanky body stretched to full extension. The tip of his finger brushed the mahogany surface. That was enough. It clattered to the floor next to him.

Ah Kin Mai started to pick himself up and let loose a bilingual "Noooooo!"

Mom and Pop entered the room. They removed extendable canes from Mom's purse and began slamming them into the priest's back. He thudded back to the floor, curling into the fetal position to protect his vitals.

Stan picked up the strap-on by the belt and held it out to his wife. "Please," he said as fountain water dripped from its tip. "Do it. The Universe needs a Big Bang. And... I need a Big Bang."

She looked at the apparatus with trepidation. "Are you sure?"

Tears filled Stan's eyes as he pulled down his trousers. "Yes. Yes. A thousand times yes. Since that first time we met outside Mr. FitzTerminator's room, all I've wanted is you...is you...is you to put a stick up my butt as far as the one up his."

"Is that safe?" she asked. "He was really constipated."

Ah Kin Mai roared. The senior citizens flew back, propelled by an invisible force. He ran for Emily. Four steps away, three steps, two...

"Do it!" Stan yelled.

She plunged in, penetrating Stan like a hot knife through butt-er. A brilliant light emanated from Stan's rectal cavity. He and The Universe sighed twin sighs of fulfillment and relief. The dream of a decade satisfied. The light passed over the room, the city, the world, the

cosmos. When it faded, Ah Kin Mai cracked and crumbled and collapsed into ash. His remains drifted away on the wind.

The world seemed a brighter, better place after the Big Bang, every color more vibrant. The deific dildo disappeared, and Stan reapplied his pantaloons. He stood, beaming at his legs and his wife. He and Emily embraced. An indeterminate period later, they heard cooing across the room. Wrapped in two tiny silk blankets, two babies wiggled and jiggled. Emily picked them up.

“Mom and Pop,” said Stan. He watched them grab Emily’s face over and over, giggling all the while. “They certainly seem to think you’re significant now.”

Emily smiled, feigning a confused expression. “I thought anal wouldn’t make babies.”

Stan laughed. He knew humor. He pulled out his sketch pad and flipped to a blank page. “You three are beautiful.”

“Yup,” she said. “You’ve got us pegged.”

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# PATRICK ROBERT WALSH

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## EDUCATION

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### The Pennsylvania State University

State College, PA

*College of the Liberal Arts*

Master of Arts Degree in Creative Writing

Expected Graduation May 2023

Bachelor of Arts Degrees in English and History

Graduation May 2022

Minors in Arabic and German

Dean's List: 7/7 Semesters

## EMPLOYMENT

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### Smeal Center for Global Business Studies

State College, PA

*Writer | Research Assistant*

August 2020 – Present

- Researched various topics related to U.S. immigration, economics, and cryptocurrency
- Wrote chapters for publication in Dr. Fariborz Ghadar's upcoming book
- Presented on immigration topics to global business leaders
- Managed Dr. Ghadar's social media accounts

### YM Tennis

Yardley, PA

*Senior Instructor*

June 2017 – August 2019

- Supervised 30 children and 5 junior instructors on a daily basis
- Organized camp and maintained a safe environment
- Improved aptitude in social and professional interactions

## LEADERSHIP & PHILANTHROPY

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### Phi Alpha Theta

State College, PA

*Vice President*

March 2021 – Present

- The Penn State chapter of the National History Honors Society
  - Started and registered the student-run wing of the organization
  - Organized meetings of the club and executive board
  - Set up lectures from prestigious guest speakers

### Corona Caveman Challenge

Yardley, PA

*Creative Lead*

April – June 2020

- A social media challenge encouraging people to donate the money typically spent on grooming to feed children at risk of starvation
  - Raised over \$2,000
  - Wrote and edited mission statement, articles, and social media posts

### LEV THON Organization

State College, PA

*Member*

2018 – Present

- Fundraised for and participated in the largest student-run philanthropic organization in the country
- Hosted and entertained a Four Diamond child diagnosed with cancer

### Pine Ridge Reservation

Porcupine, SD

*Educational Assistant*

April – May 2019

- Assisted Teach For America corps member's mission to educate Oglala Sioux middle schoolers
  - Provided guidance and support in the classroom and on a field trip
  - Added books to the classroom library
  - Explained mathematical and cultural concepts

## AWARDS, SKILLS, & INTERESTS

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- Paterno Fellow in the Schreyer Honors College
- Recipient of the Provost Scholarship
- Member of the Penn State Club Tennis Team
- Story published by Klio (the PSU online literary journal)
- Conversational German Speaker
- Interests: Comedy, Science Fiction, Cooking, Classic Rock, Television/Movies